

**MILLET BEER BREWING AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLE IN THE LIVES OF MAFA  
WOMEN IN THE FAR NORTH PROVINCE OF CAMEROON**



**By Ganava André**

**Master Thesis in Visual Cultural Studies**  
*Visual Cultural Studies Program, Institute of Social Anthropology*  
**Faculty of Social Science, University of Tromsø**  
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**DEDICATION**

*To my little Sisters*



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## **LIST OF LOCAL DIALECT WORDS USED IN THE TEXT**

***Arki:*** strong liquor distilled from millet

***Bilbil:*** Usual name of millet beer in Cameroon

***Djaouro:*** A term from Fulani which means administrative chief of the quarter

***Dounia:*** Fulani concept which refers to people, in this sense people means just other

***Halal:*** term from Fulani which means something personal, here it used in this text as a personal or own house

***Islamisation:*** to convert to Islam

***Kirdi:*** term used by Muslim people do refer to non-Islamized population living in Northern Cameroon

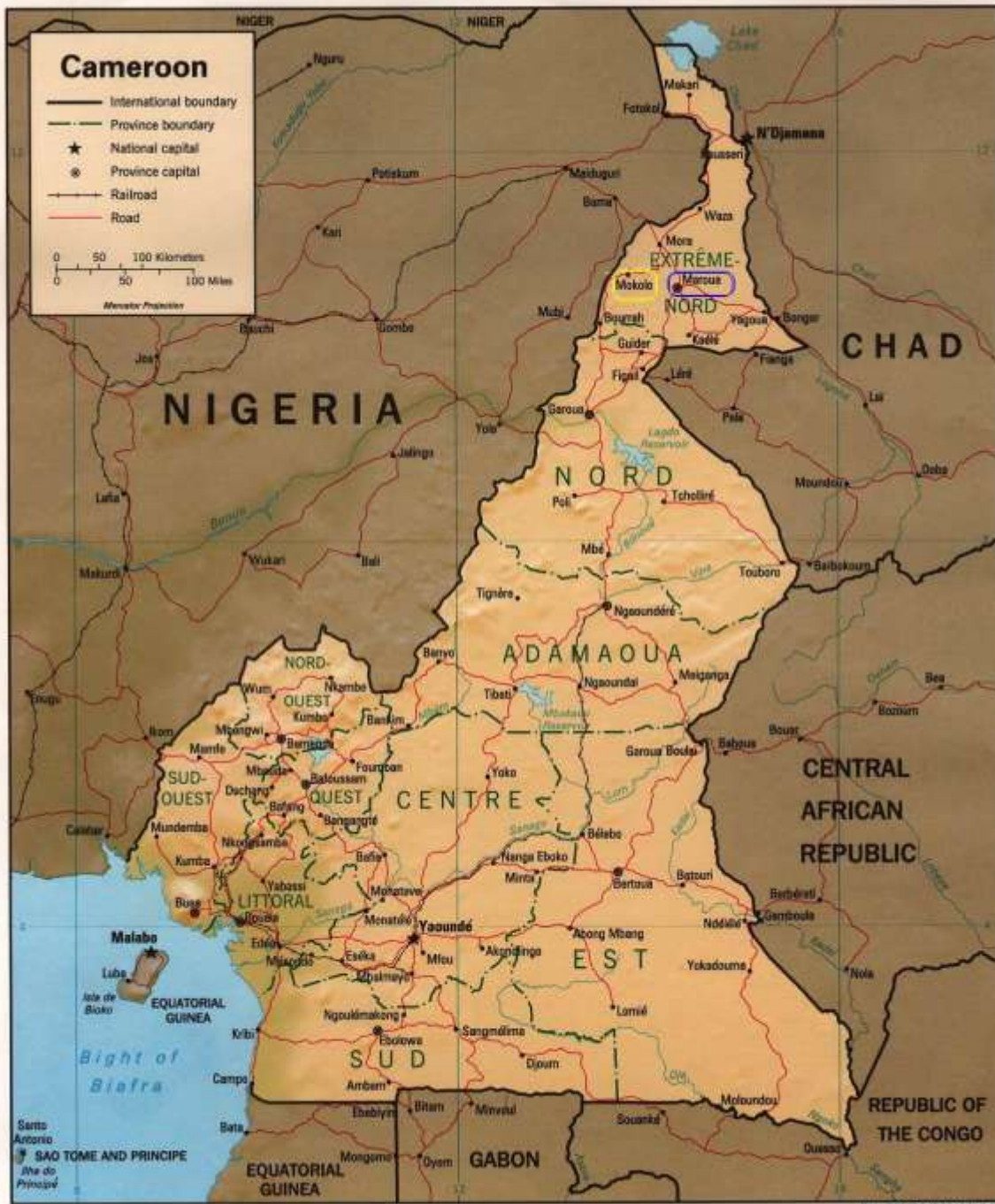
***Karal:*** Name used for a variety of sorghum cultivated during the dry season

***Lamido:*** a term from Fulani which refer to the high traditional authority

***Sare:*** term from Fulani which design the family compound usually surrounded by a wall

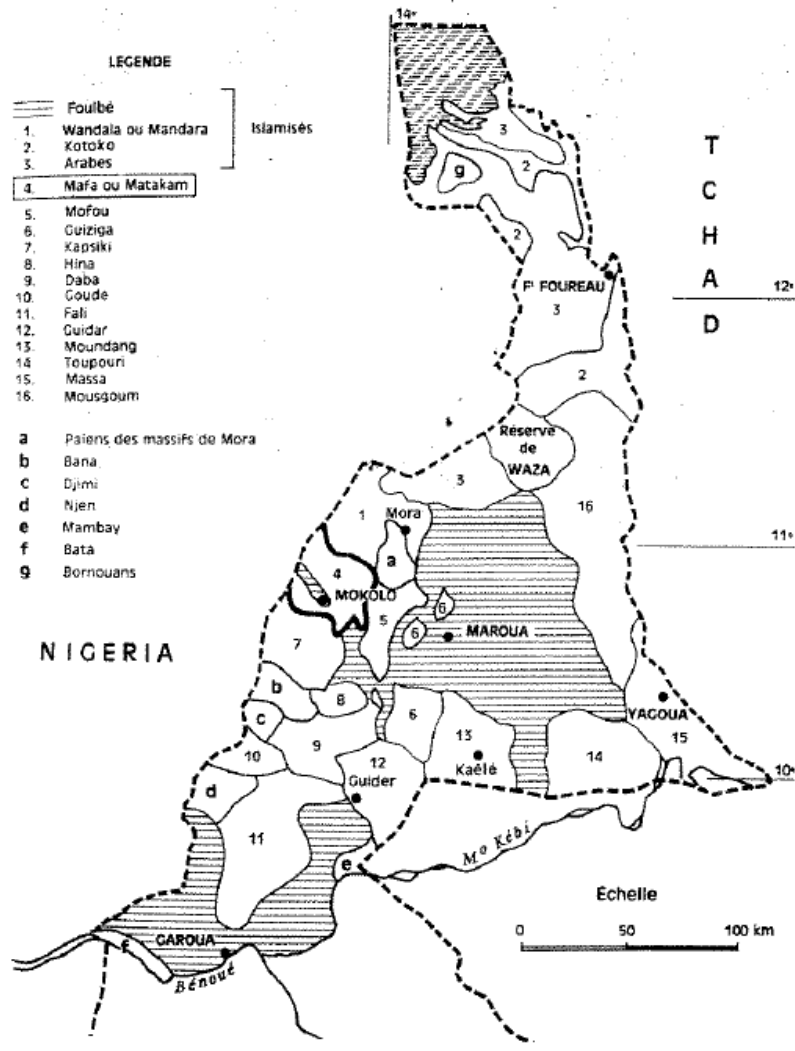


Figure 2 : Location of Maroua and Mokolo in Cameroon<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> - Map printed from : [www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cameroon.html](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cameroon.html)

Figure 2: Mafa location<sup>2</sup>



Principal ethnic groups in Mokolo as constructed and distinguished by the French Colonial Government (Podlewski 1966)

<sup>2</sup> - Map printed from Van Santen(1993:37)

## **ABSTRACT:**

This thesis is aimed at investigating the relevance of beer brewing among the Mafa women located in the Far Northern Province of Cameroon. It makes the assumption that though there are several attempts by various bodies to fight the beer brewing as an activity of women; it continues to occupy a central aspect of their lives. It is claimed in this thesis that, beer brewing though challenging for the Mafa women seems the only economic venture available for them to save money.

In talking about the relevance of beer brewing in the lives of Mafa women, it is claimed that the cabaret which is central in the beer brewing activity can also be a reflection of how life is within the society. This is understood better in the film: *Le Cabaret de la Mater (Mater's Pub)* which is a part of the thesis. The cabaret serves as a place of socialization for many people within the community and also a platform for the discussion of several issues of concern in the society ranging from political to social.

It would also be claimed in this work that, the activity which has met so much opposition from society especially section of religious bodies and NGOs, has via giving economic autonomy to women, resulted in the change of some of the old structures and male-female relation within the Mafa household. It is accordingly not uncommon to see the Mafa woman contributing towards the maintenance of the house: something that had solely been the responsibility of the man.

Though this thesis does not completely rule out the fact that, the brewing of beer could have negative effects in the society, it is asserted that the advantages of this activity far out weight its disadvantages. Thus, beer brewing could cause alcoholism and food scarcity because people assume that what is used in brewing beer could be used in preparation of food in the society. I accept these as some of the negative impacts; but also admit the fact that, it also creates the opportunity for women to attain economic self-reliance is very crucial.

**Key words:** Mafa women, beer brewing, economic autonomy, old family structures, cabaret.





## INTRODUCTION

This study is one of the many attempts undertaken by social scientists aimed at understanding what Obbo (1980) calls “*everyday struggle of women*” in the third world in general and particularly in Africa. According to her, this struggle is necessitated by need to ameliorate upon or change their condition of life. My main preoccupation in this thesis is to discuss how women’s beer brewing activity can be both a part of and also contribute to the ongoing changes in the gender relation in Northern Cameroon. My contribution to this gender debate concentrates on the Mafa women migrants living in the outskirts of Maroua town. Mafa is one of the various ethnics of Mandara Mountain groups in Cameroon where the woman is traditionally perceived as “*legal minors and the wards first of their fathers and then of their husbands*” (Sterner and David, 1991:558). In terms of production and distribution of familial income, she used to act just as a support for the man.

The man is the one who controls everything in the unit of production (household). This project focuses on how women in this society are struggling to build their economic autonomy, which I assume could be one of the important elements or ways of their ‘emancipation’, though it is sometimes tricky. I assume it is tricky because from my experience in this study, the autonomy of women can generate conflict in the family and even separation of the family structure. I would like to discuss this problem by focusing on one specific activity: brewing beer for money. This activity should be seen here as one of the rare opportunities they find to get some money which helps towards realizing their dream of economic reliance. I say rare opportunity because, it is not only the social structure which constitute the obstacle for cash income, the natural environment is not favorable enough for economic mobility in this part of Cameroon. Despite the generally negative connotation of beer brewing and its relation to the tradition, Mafa women and many others have made it their main economic activity. Compared to their traditional position in the household, where they depend on men, women are able, through brewing beer, to finance certain expenditure relating to both the daily needs of the household and their individual needs. Based on the economic empowerment that women have attained through the brewing of beer, I make a tentative claim that it has had some positive effects on the lives of women who are into the beer brewing entrepreneurs.

The fieldwork took place then in the outskirts of Maroua town, in the quarter called Ouro Tchede where brewing of *bilbil* (common name of millet beer in Northern Cameroon) is one of the main daily activities of women. As mentioned earlier, the focus is more on the Mafa community.

It is worth pointing out that the original place of Mafa is Mokolo. They belong to this Mountain group of population called Mont Mandara. Though not primary in this thesis, the study could help us understand some factors that cause migration in this region. Below is the organization of the work which is structured in seven chapters.

The first chapter presents us with the living condition of Mafa people and some assumption about their tendency of moving to surrounding city. It also deals with the complexity of this ethnic group.

The second chapter: research question and theoretical perspective gives some idea about what has to be discussed and the some concepts used in this thesis.

My ways into this research in Ouro Tchede is the title of the third chapter. It develops how I decided to do my field work in this region of Maroua. It deals with practical approach or strategy I used to carry out my research.

The fourth chapter presents the beer brewing as a controversial economic activity of women in the milieu.

The fifth chapter tries to illustrate the beer activity in Bava's family; the main household where I carried out the field work.

The sixth chapter entitled women's control of earning tries to compare beer income in relation to men income in the household. It show also how beer activity is more a strategy or way to build women's autonomy rather than being just a way of supporting their men.

The last chapter gives us some ideas about the general perception of beer brewers within the Mafa community.

## **CHAPTER 1: MAFA PEOPLES AND THE ISSUE OF MIGRATION TO THE CITY**

In this chapter I attempt giving some general background about Mafa people. Such issues as the ambiguity of their identity as an ethnic group, the fragility of their environmental milieu, are discussed. I make the claim that their milieu is one of the reasons of their lives which are defined between their villages and surrounding cities. I will further investigate the position of women in the light of this migration which is in fact seen as a means of survival for this people.

### **1. Mafa people in rural milieu (Mokolo)**

#### ***1.1.1. Mafa or Matakam: an elusive ethnic group***

Mafa is an ethnic group that belongs to the big group called usually *Kirdi* living in Mont Mandara. *Kirdi* is a term used by Muslim people to refer to all non-Islamized population located in Northern Cameroon<sup>3</sup>. They have a population of about 200.000 people, and are considered to be the largest ethnic group in this region. They are mostly located in Mokolo, a subdivision of the Mayo-Tsanaga department. Mafa peoples are also called Matakam, though this name has pejorative connotation. As Van Santen (1993:38) points out in her work about women in Mokolo, "*The Mafa them self however loathe the term and consider it more and more as insult*".

According to Lavergne (1990:7) the name Matakam originated from Fulbe. He said: "*The legend wants that one of lieutenants of Lawal, in front of the nudity of these primitive people, exclaimed by seeing them: "are these our so frightening there?" and has treated them as "mettayamen" (plural of mettayamjo), deprecating term reserved for human beings that nature has not favoured, the lack of clothing for peuhls is a clear sign of poverty, lack of dignity, inferiority.*"<sup>4</sup>

Thus the term *Mettayamen* became Matakam and used to designate not only Mafa people, but all the mountain population in this region as well. By referring to the mountain population, it becomes sometimes difficult to distinguish between the Matakam who call themselves Mafa and other group of people (*Mufu, Hide, kapsiki, Mineo* etc...) living in the region of Mont Mandara. (See diagram below). In general, the study of Mafa as ethnic group in North Cameroon, shows

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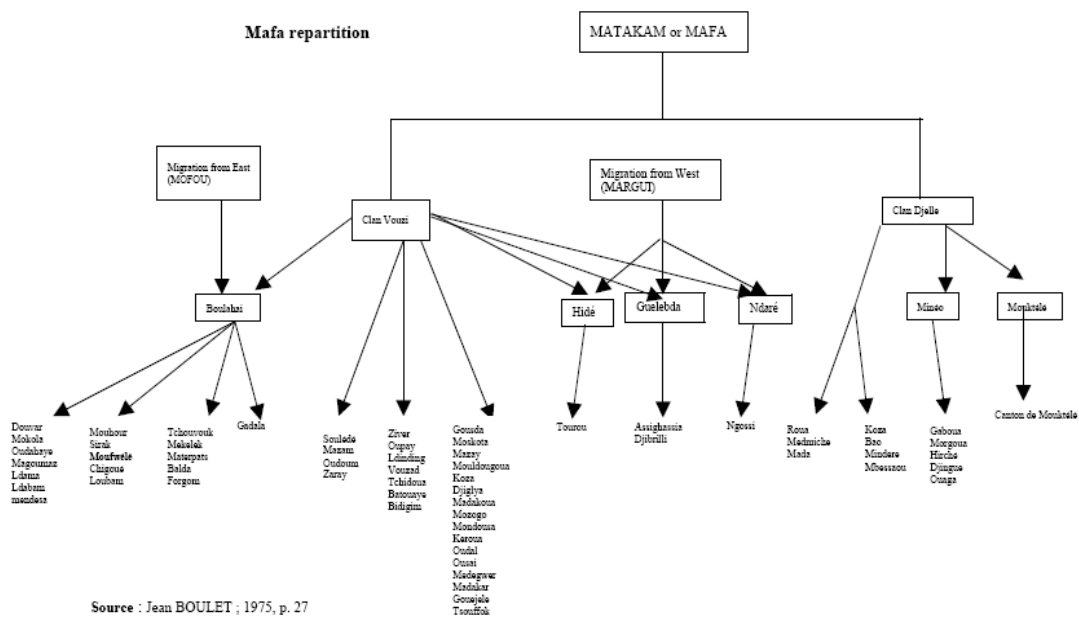
<sup>3</sup> - For more details about Kirdi see Schaller, Yves. (1973)

<sup>4</sup>- My translation from the French source.

that neither ‘cultural explanation’ nor ‘political explanations’ as used in the ethnicity debate, could elucidate what exactly defines the boundaries of ethnic identity<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, Boutrais (1984:134) notices that Mafa ethnicity appears much like an assembly of heterogeneous groups who randomly at the time of their displacement, found themselves in the same territory. After long cohabitation in the same area, the clash of the same daily problems has enabled them to acquire some amount of common way of life. I could not discuss at all here the elusive particularity of Mafa identity. I would like just to make some precision most of people I am referring to as my main informants in this writing belong to this group of Mafa called *Boulahai*. They live in the south of Mokolo. They refer to themselves as *Mofélé* (sometimes written in certain literature *Mofolé* or *Mofouélé*); they don’t want to be called Matakam. Their dialect is different from the other Mafa. As Van Santen points out, they underline and express this identity in song, dance and other cultural performances, within state-organized cultural events that they are not Matakam (Van Santen, 1993: 39). This is actually just one example among these diverse branches of Mafa as we can see in the diagram below.

**Figure 3: Diagram of Mafa ethnic diversity**



<sup>5</sup> - For more details about the discussion of Mafa identity see Van Santen (2000)

### ***1.1.2. Ecological milieu and the issue of migration***

Mafa populations mostly live in the mountain environment. It is where they have developed what has been termed as “*Terrace farming*” (Muller-Kosack: 2001). It is walls of stone they have manually built from the bottom to the top of the mountain to prevent possible erosion. That is where they cultivate necessary food crops for the survival generation after generation.

**Figure 4: Example of Mafa Landscape<sup>6</sup>**



Van Santen also offers some details on how these people make use of their environment by saying that:

*“The Mafa use all the space there is: they live on the plateau, at the foot of the mountains, on the inaccessible massifs, and even on the highest parts of the mountains they have settled. This is due to the fact that the area has a very high population density. In certain places it is as high as 400 people per square kilometer. For that reason, Iyebi-Mandjek (1993: 3) calls the area overpopulated. Indeed, it exhibits all the phenomena that justify the use of such a term: peasants without land; constant danger of famine; precarious participation in the exchange*

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<sup>6</sup> - Picture by the author

*economy; and hardly any surplus production to be sold in order to pay taxes” (Van Santen 1998:404).*

In general the production of millet remains their main preoccupation. They practice annual crop rotation: one year sorghum (called locally *dao dao ged*) is planted and the next year for the small millet called in Mafa *n'tumas*. They also grow some secondary crops such as groundnuts, sesame, beans, peas, taro, potato which are meant for commercial purposes though sometimes used by the household. Though the production of cotton was introduced in Northern Cameroon by the French colonialism since 1951, as an economic culture, it is not well integrated in the agricultural system of people of the mountain. It is more practiced by the people located within the plain.

Mafa people also rear steers, sheep, goats, and fowls. This small family breeding mostly plays the role of savings for the family. In general, their monetary revenue is weak. Antoinette Hallaire (1991:107) in line with what has been claimed by many researchers laments that they are among the poorest populations in Cameroon. She asserts that:

*“Their incomes remain very modest in the range of 30 to 40000 CFA francs per exploitation and a year. In spite of their efforts, their art to get the best possible they can have from this environment their courage in the work, they are classified among the poorest of Cameroon”*<sup>7</sup>. This is one of the reasons which could explain why during the dry season, most of young men go to look for temporary jobs in other places: harvesting cotton, transplanting of sorghum of dry season called locally *karal* in the surrounding of Maroua, construction or rehabilitation of houses among others. Others even go as far as to Nigeria for example. Some of them decide to work all the time where they find that “life is much easier for them” and come home only to visit the family.

We could argue that the precarious nature of life in the mountains is responsible for the migration of Mafa people to other places. Though this migration was first associated with men, there is a new trend where women are actively participating in this migration as well. Women could either migrate alone, or follow their men. In this sense these people in general have used migration here as a part of way life, as a strategy for survival.

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<sup>7</sup>- My own translation from French to English

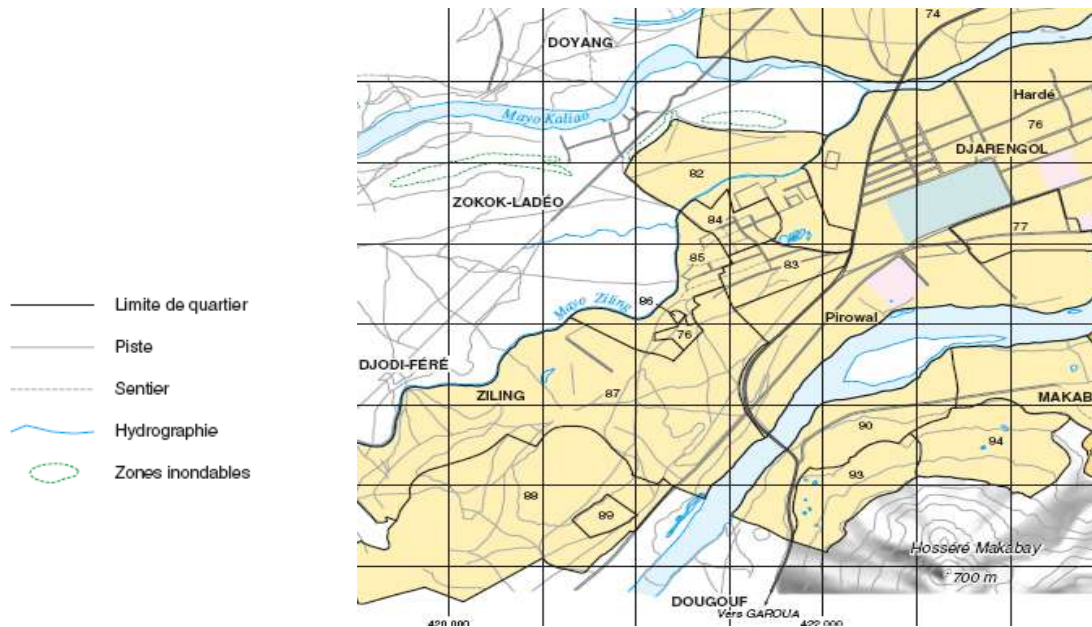
Though these women engage in diverse activities, this study concentrates on just brewing beer which is in fact the main economic activity of the non Islamized Mafa women. With this, we could know also something about their living condition and their expectation from their activity in town. To help me look closely at my preoccupation, I will take the example of some Mafa living in the outskirts of Maroua town, precisely within Ouro Tchede where I did my field work.

## 1.2. Mafa life in the merge of the city: the case of Ouro-Tchede

### 1.2.1. Ouro Tchede: Place, people and activities

Ouro Tchede literally translated from Fulbe language into English means “*Local of money*” which could explain partially the fact that most of land there was bought. This explains also the fact that migrants mostly populate Ouro Tchede. In fact, it is a small quarter situated in the entrance of Maroua town in its periphery, in the Northern part of the town. Ouro-Tchede is bounded in North by *Mayo Ziling* , the *Doyand* quarter, in the South by *Carrefour Para*, in the East part by the *Djarengol* and in the West by quarter of *Ziling*. (The point **83** in the map refers to Ouro Tchede local)

**Figure 5: Ouro Tchede location**<sup>8</sup>



<sup>8</sup> - Map extracted from Seignobos and Iyebi-Manjeek, (1999:31)

According to one of the chiefs of local area of Ouro-Tchede, named *djaouro*<sup>9</sup>Moussa Mamoudou, the chief of *Douka*, precisely where my main informant family live; Ouro Tchede was created 30 years ago. It was in 1977, that the Minister of urbanization and habitat with the mayor of Maroua; decided to move some people from *Burku Chede* to this place because they wanted to build a secondary at *Burku Chede*. The secondary school is called “*College de l’Espoir*”. The actual local of Ouro Tchede was divided in a small piece of land then given to people coming from Burku Tchede for free, but as time went on, they began to sell it also to people from other surroundings of Maroua region or abroad. According to the data from the Provincial Delegation of health of Far North Province of Cameroon, the population of Ouro Tchede in 2005 was 11108 and 11430 in 2006. Administratively, the district of Ouro - Tchede is divided into four small quarters linked to the general *Lamidat* (a Fulbe leader, it is also a title given nowadays to the higher traditional administrator of society) of Maroua each by its different *djaouro*. (*Ouro mal Dairou* by Haman Dairou, *Madagascar* by Hamadou Hassoumi, *Sous-manguier* by Haman Dairou and *Douka* where my field work was based by Hamadou Hassoumi)

The first people who lived in Ouro Tchede could be the Fulani cattle men, who looked for pasture. They found the place near the Mayo (river) of Ziling and settled there with their animals. They were later joined by Guiziga, Mufu and later other ethnic groups. The indigenous people of the place are actually distributed among these three ethnic groups. Toupuri, Moundang Mafa and many other ethnic groups are considered purely as a new comer in spite of the time they spend there. Most of them came first to supply the labor force in the area or to look for jobs in the city of Maroua. Some of them didn’t return home. They are rather joined by other member of the family and friends from time to time. These people who joined them could either come from their home town or village. Most of them have bought land and built house. This became somehow their “new home”. We can even decipher that there is a tendency for each ethnic to stay in the same area. This is why some local in Ouro Tchede is called “quartier Mokolo” because most of the occupants there are from Mokolo, quarter of Toupuri, quarter of Moundang.

### ***1.2.2. Presentation of the Mafa population in Ouro Tchede***:

Though I do not have recent statistics on the population of the Mafa people which is the main target of this study in Ouro Tchede, Iyebi-Mandjek and Seignobos (2000) argue that, Mafa

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<sup>9</sup> - A term from Fulani which means administrative chief of the quarter



people constitute the highest population of the people from Mont Mandara region, living in Maroua in general. I estimate that they constitute about 10% of Ouro-Tchede population. Without taking into account those who are scattered in all area. They are mostly found at settings which are entirely owned by them. The first is located in *Ziling* called also “*quartier Mokolo*” another group is located in the other side of *Mayo-Ziling* in the place call *Djodi-féré*. (See map above)

The influx was gradual, and Ouro Tchede became populated with many different ethnic groups, with different social classes and occupations. (Copers, civil servant, farmer, herders, idle etc...). Without being necessary and attractive urban area people are interested in this quarter because of its location of being close to town, the land was also cheap. Then most of immigrants came and got the place there by owning or renting houses and lands. Most of Men work as: bricklayer, butcher, and security guards in the shops or in the offices, cleaners or agent of maintenance, barbers...). Women are coping with housework, but also doing some small commerce at the quarter to help their husbands as it is commonly said in the milieu “*pour joindre les deux bouts*” (to join both ends) which means to survive.

The first day I went to Ouro-Tchede, I was already impressed to see a lot of women involved in productive activities. Along the walls of houses which go along the axis leading directly to my informant’s place situated just next to the police station of Ouro Tchede, we can see almost every day from 8am to 1 or 2 pm, approximately around thirty women or more, sitting each in front of small goods. Apparently insignificant as one may think, when one asks these women on details this small goods, one gets such answers as that it is their “*yamdu*” which means food; it is their “*Sabulo*” (soap), it is their “*manda*” (salt) etc...

Some of them sell vegetable, spicy from their home town, dry fish, doughnuts, salt peanuts, sweet peanuts. Others sell beans, millet, corn etc. This small market is mostly dominated by Muslims women. If we look more around the quarter, most of women are more concern with the brewing of millet beer, which is *bilbil*.

From this presentation of the daily activities of people of Ouro Tchede, one can feel a slight specification of labor. Men are more concerned with the temporary or small job in the city center, while women are more concentrated in the quarter, at home. Among these diverse

activities of the feminine resourcefulness, the production of *bilbil* is more popular. This is the activity that has so far attracted my attention.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL APPROACH AND RESEARCH QUESTION

### 2.3. *Theoretical perspectives*

The participation of women in beer brewing is my main concern in this study. To help me orient my study about gender relation, and also the complexity of the society where their fight for survival take place, I will make use of the following perspective and concepts:

I choose the *interactionism* as a theoretical guide. Symbolic interactionism, otherwise known as interactionism, is one of the major theoretical perspectives in sociology but widely used in ethnography as well. Mead (1934) work's *Mind, Self and Society*, is one of the determinant approach which has contributed to the foundation of this theory. The interaction of an individual's self-conception ("I") and the generalized, perceived view that others have of the individual ("Me") is central to Mead's sociological viewpoint. Thus his way of conceiving the self as emerging from the social interaction of humans could help me to talk about beer brewers' *identity* in this work.

Herbert Blumer (who is inspired from Mead), is the brain child behind the coining the term, "symbolic interactionism," as well as for formulating the well-known version of the theory. He suggests that "*From the standpoint of symbolic interactionism human group life is a process in which objects are being created, affirmed, transformed, and cast aside. The life and action of people necessary change in line with the changes taking place in their world of objects*" (Blumer, 1969:12).

Some of the characteristics of the symbolic interaction perspective are an emphasis on interactions among people, use of symbols in communication and interaction, interpretation as part of action, self as constructed by others through communication and interaction, and flexible, adjustable social processes. Its concern tends to be the interaction order of daily life and experiences, rather than the structures associated with large scale and relatively fixed social forces and laws.

By choosing this approach, I would like to discuss the issue of gender relations among Mafa people in terms of reciprocal process of *negotiation* by exploring the ways in which women and men act to support and/or challenge the existing system of gender relation in their society.

Barth's concept of *boundaries* in his approach of ethnic identity will be useful to clarify the gender relation in accordance with this interactionism perspective. His main idea is that societies may be poly-ethnic and thus contain delineated and distinctive groups that the boundaries of societies may not only be relative but also "permeable" in the sense that people may permanently cross into another society. As Gerson and Peiss (1985) underline, refocusing the analysis of gender divisions by using the concept of boundaries can help to overcome the problem of universality in the "separate spheres" formulation. Boundary is a more generic term which simultaneously allows us to see specific commonalities and discern actual differences in historical and current patterns of gender-based experiences.<sup>10</sup> This concept could be helpful in discussing the elusive identity and role of the contemporary Mafa women.

The concept of *entrepreneur*, also developed by Barth (1972) could help to understand the innovative aspects of how women deal with the activity of beer brewing. According to Barth "*an entrepreneur is someone who takes the initiative in administrating resources, and pursues an expansive economic policy. These characteristics imply that the entrepreneur must initiate and coordinate a number of inter-personal relationships in a supervisory capacity to effectuate his enterprise*" (Op.cit, p.5).

My understanding of entrepreneurship here will be based on how Mafa women have taken the initiatives not to brew beer for money but to brew beer as a separate income in the urban settings, notwithstanding the several opinions and organizations that oppose the proliferation of this activity. This could make it possible for me to explain the "*factors encouraging and channeling or inhibiting*" this activity, which is controversial in some milieus. Barth underlines also that "*The goods which are obtained through entrepreneurial activity are clearly not restricted to purely monetary or even material forms, but may take the form of power, rank or experience and skill; indeed one or more of these forms may be the explicit goal of an entrepreneur*" (Op.cit, p.8). Then, my challenge here is to find what is /are the explicit goal(s) of women behind the activity of beer production. In other words, what are the results of this activity in the lives of these women in this milieu?

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<sup>10</sup> - Gerson and Peiss refer also to some of Rosaldo's (1980) idea in this analysis of gender.

With these approaches based on the theory of interactionism and concepts mentioned above, I would like to have a perspective which both incorporates how the action of the individual changes the system, and how the system influences the actions of the individual.

I thus have the aim of finding out how their identity is constructed through the activities of their daily life and, individual's actions and how this is negotiated with the rest of the society.

The Mafa women and specifically the beer brewer; should be perceived as the active creators of their own destinies within certain constraints, rather than as passive victims or objects. My conclusion on this approach could be based also on Gerson and Kathy ideas which argue that: *“This formulation of gender asserts that gender is defined by socially constructed relationships between women and men, among women, and among men in social groups. Gender is not a rigid or reified analytic category imposed on human experience, but a fluid one whose meaning emerges in specific social contexts as it is created and recreated through human actions”* (Gerson and Peiss, 1985:319).

## **2.1. Research questions**

By looking at the expansion of millet beer brewing and the consumption of beer in this part of Cameroon like in many other places, it is assumed that it would not be a bad idea to investigate the impact(s) of alcoholism in this society. However, this research focuses on the activities of the beer makers without detailed attention to the effects of alcoholism. I would like to understand through these activities of brewery of *bilbil*, the link between the economic and the social position in the Mafa society of these woman *entrepreneurs*. Making beer is not something which makes them “millionaires”, but still the income or the production of beer affects their economic lives positively.

The main preoccupation here is to know how the beer brewing influences the social position of the women who are involved in it.

- **Does taking part in this activity contribute to improve upon their economic conditions?**
- **How does this activity affect the relationships within the households in which women are involved in beer production?**

From these questions, I would like to understand how deprived women build their (*economic*) *autonomy* via beer brewing. To understand what is meant by autonomy, we should

first put this concept within the context of the management of resources in the household. What we should know also here is the fact that we are in a society where traditionally women and men work together. But the little income from their major activity, which is farming is controlled and redistributed by the head of the household, which is always the husband. It is the men who decide what could be for what (food, clothing, schooling, and other basic needs). This means that, for the personal needs, woman should ask the man or wait for her husband to act on impulse. Thus, I mean by autonomy here the woman's possibility to do thing as she pleases with her profits from the activities she has initiated herself. She can choose what will go towards the daily food costs of the household, or what for family expenses like renting or building a house, educating the children, clothing among others. She also decides what could be reinvested in the business or saved for her future needs.

## **2.2. My Assumptions**

My assumption is that:

By brewing beer as an economic activity, women acquire some *financial autonomy* and consequently certain roles in the household are changed, like providing food, clothes, and school for kids) for her family from her separate income. As Tripp (1989:603) underlines: “*Autonomy within the context of the household economy involves the ability to make up one's mind about whether or not an at-tempt should be made to generate some extra cash in the informal sector, to determine what kind of activity this should be, and to make all the major decisions relating to its operation.*” These opportunities affect the woman’s classical position of being “dependent on men”. With the financial empowerment, they are able to contribute towards the upkeep of the house and even have even their *halal* which means “own houses”.

It is observed that when women get the chance, to care for themselves this way, the *power* relation between men and women change. Power should be understood here from the viewpoints of Foucault used by Hall for whom: “*power does not 'function in the form of a chain' – it circulates. It is never monopolized by one centre. It is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization'. This suggests that we are all, to some degree, caught up in its circulation*” Hall (1997:50). In this sense power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society. Which means that, at any level of society, anybody

according to the circumstances can exercise power. This means that power is not a property of men, it can be owned by women as well. In other words the financial *autonomy* of woman affects and changes the relationship between men and women.

By having the possibility to earn money, women seem to be no more condemned to depend on her husband's, father's, or brother's property. They more and more aim to have as they say their *halal* (own house). In this plan I think also that women's beer brewing is both a part of - and contributes to the ongoing changes in the gender relations in Northern Cameroon like elsewhere in many other African societies.





## CHAPTER 3: MY WAYS INTO THIS RESEARCH IN OURO TCHEDE

### 3.1. Choice of place and informants

#### 3.1.1. Choice of the Ouro-Tchede as a location for my fieldwork.

According to my initial plan for this research, I wanted to do my field work in my hometown. As I had already decided to work with Mafa women, this place seemed to me the ideal place, because it is where Mafa people live. But I was as yet undecided as to whether in the rural area or in the city. My purpose was just to see how this activity of beer production helps Mafa women's life, what they gain from this 'alcoholic' activity which is quantitatively and spatially increasing day after day. Thus I arrived in Mokolo on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 2007. I stayed for some days with parents. Naturally as a traveler, particularly coming from Europe, it is my duty to visit some closed relatives and friends.

While on visits to close friends and relatives, I was, at the same time inviting or introducing my self to the world of the 'Cabaret'<sup>11</sup>, because it is where most of people spend their time, particularly during the dry season as the time I was there. "*He went to collect Leeko* (a free sample of beer); "*Go to dada (mother) of X cabaret or X wife's cabaret*"; "*Today is Y. day, it is the day of the market of this or that quarter, you will find him there*" are the common sentences you can hear. Then progressively, I was already visiting some cabarets. Without presenting myself as a researcher, or with a purpose of making film about the cabaret, I was already on the field.

At the same time I was attracted to do my fieldworks in Maroua. Two things attracted me there: the proportion of beer brewing because Maroua is on of the most popular towns of Cameroon in terms of beer brewing activity and the amount of people from Mokolo living there. I was curious about the fact that too many Mafa women and men from this area of Mokolo are moving there to earn money. The last but not the least reason to do my fieldwork in Maroua, I didn't want to do it in my village just because I want to experiment how I can familiarize and do my research with people I do not know before as long as I can understand the language.

Some go temporary; some establish their living there i.e. in Maroua. It is a town situated about one hour by car from Mokolo. I decided to go there. I chose at random some quarter. I did

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<sup>11</sup> - Cabaret is a usual name of the structure where people make and drink the millet beer in Cameroon.

some tours in some cabarets in the most popular brewing center: *Pont Vert, Pitware, Kaleore, Palar, Domayo Jaringol, Ouro Tchede etc...* I decided to focus more in quarter Ouro Tchede because of the amount of Mafa community I have met and the number of their women involved in the activity of beer brewing, in this little local of Ouro Tchede and secondly the sociological composition of the population who are mostly immigrants.

### 3.1.2. Choice of Cabaret and Informants

There are many cabarets in Ouro-Tchede but which one to choose and this choice was to influence the choice of informants also. Some cabarets are named after the owner like *Le Cabaret de la Mater*, some names are borrowed from the actuality, habitually ‘dramatic’ actuality, at the time of their creation. That is why some cabarets are named for example “*Bakassi*” (related to the actuality about the conflict between Cameroon and Nigeria); “*Base Congo*” which related to the actuality of conflict in Republic Democratic of Congo, “*Kambutch*” related to some knowledge old news about conflict in Cambodia etc... Further other held name like Seignobos (2002) has also tried to list some: «*Pharmacie de garde*» (Pharmacy of guard); «*Dispensaire de la soif* » (Free health center of the thirst), «*hospital de souci*» (hospital of depression) etc... Other has simple indication such as “*bon bilbil chez Tchemne*” or according to the place available in the cabaret. The pictures below give us some detail about how we can easily distinguish the cabaret from normal family housing, because sometimes there is no distinction between the compound and cabaret like in the case of my main informants as we can see in the film “*Le cabaret de la Mater*”

**Figure 6: Indications of cabarets<sup>12</sup>**



Good *bilbil* in TICHEMNE...



Appointment in channel vision of Wouro Tchede 500places

I have tried to go to some of these cabarets, but most of them were characterized as one of my friend who used to go there said as a “*place for persons without responsibility*”. He is

<sup>12</sup> - Pictures by the author.

referring to the kind of drinkers which is not to much my preoccupation, but I was a bit frustrated by the noises my self. In some cabaret, because of the rhythm of the production of beer, I could not make the distinction between the routine or ambiance of the cabaret and their normal daily life without beer.

I went to one woman's place, whose name I had heard of whilst still in Mokolo, that she makes *bilbil* in Maroua town. Her name is Ngriya. I tried to explain my preoccupation about a place to setup my fieldwork. After I told her about some noisy cabarets I had been to already, she reacted directly that: "*these cabarets are not a good place to make serious study about beer brewing. People will destroy your camera*". She told me that she is not anymore doing well with beer brewing but she could accompany me to some place where I could ask them if they could allow me to carry out my research at their place.

Then we went to Bava's house called also Dada Weleme cabaret (the cabaret of Weleme's Mother) or *Le Cabaret de la Mater* which means Mater's Pub. We met on of Bava's wife outside, it was Mater she was drying the millet. Bava the head of the family was in the hangar where they cook and sell beer. He told us that he just went back from his work but he is still going back soon. Ngriya presented me as a student coming from the same village as Bava. I got also an opportunity to present directly myself as a student who is doing a research in beer activity. Without explaining deeply my project, the head of the family said that if I wanted I could do my film at his place. I was easily accepted without any further question or agreement about my project. I begin to ask myself if he knows what I want to do really, how I am going to do. I was thinking that He was in a hurry to go to his job. But later on I found out that his point was to help me as a student; particularly from his village do my research. This is fine for me but maybe I have to be aware about how I am going to deal with information I need from them. If I just trust this will to help me on behalf of I am a student from my informant village, I could ask them in one week some questions or ask them to do something for me according to my topic then everything should be done. To avoid such naivety which can lead to some uncertain information, I found useful method of participant observation with or without my camera.

Day after day, week after week, within the period of the three months I have spend there, I have come to familiarize my self with not only the members of the main household but also, I almost became friend to many millet beer consumers, maybe if I have stayed more I could be

myself “*un bon buveur de bi*” (a good drinker). It became more and more remarkable if I was not in the cabaret. I was invited to many others neighboring cabarets where I discover how others women are organized, what the difference between Touपुरi, Moundang, Guiziga beer which are not necessary my focus in this study.

### **3.3. Familiarization with the milieu and my strategies**

What I mean by familiarization here is the way I integrated in Mater’s Cabaret, how I got to know their daily routines as well as how it was sometime a bit hard for me as a researcher to orient my project. The relation of my topic with beer activity, and the use of the camera make sometimes confuse my approach to peoples. In general, peoples I met in Ouro-Tchede have idea about student researcher but not “*a kind of student with a lot of equipments*” (camera equipment) as I was usually identified. For most of the people camera meant media production. In this case I am not well considered as a student of visual anthropology but as a journalist or photographer. Most of people are not familiar with the concept of Visual Anthropology. I don’t have short explanation for this too because it touching the general question of whether I should introduce Visual anthropology as: *the study of visual representational systems; and the use of visual materials in anthropological research; or the methodology and practice of using the camera in anthropological research*” (Postma and Crawford, 2006:1).

I should then try to make not only for my informants but also for myself, the difference between a journalist approach which I do not know anything about by trying to follow some of the basic methods or strategies used in general in anthropology or in other similar disciplines such as method of participant observation.

#### **3.3.1. Participant observation**

Defined in general as a process in which a researcher aim to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals in their natural setting, Spradley(1980) notice that :“*Participant observation requires the ethnographer to increase his or her awareness, to raise the level of attention, to tune in things usually tuned out*” (Spradley 1980:56).

From where I rented the room to the place I did my fieldwork, it is about forty five minute of walking distance. I went to the family once a day. At the moment I was waiting for

my research permit, I began to get more in touch with my informant's family; I wanted to spend some time there to discuss some practical issues of my field work. My presence was not well understood at the beginning which does not mean I was not welcomed. The first following day I was going back to meet the family after I met them, Mater (my main informant) was sitting outside, we greeted each other. After few minutes, he said to me: "*My son you came today, sorry we didn't tell you that we are not making bilbil today*". I was a little bit embarrassed but actually it was also an opportunity for me to complete or to add more information about my project. I tell her that I wanted to get use to the quarter, to know the way, to get also some idea about your program. Then she gives me some idea of their program of making *bilbil* in their cabaret.

By following the process of beer making, I tried to introduce myself to their daily life. Slowly, I got to know not only about the beer activity but their everyday life by taking part in or listening to their daily chats. It is where they appreciate the importance of their activity, by arguing sometime that without making beer we could not do this or do that, or comparing the success of their beer to other women's beer brewing which is sometime considered less or more successful than for them. By spending my time with my informants Mater and her co-wife Rachel and the rest of the members of their family I could grasp also their position within the household though critic or appreciation they attribute to each other.

According to Spradly, "*Ethnographers do not merely make observations; they also participate. Participation allows you to experience activities directly, to get the feel of what events are like, and to record your own perceptions. At the same time, the ethnographer can hardly ever become a complete participant in social situation*". (Spradly, 1980, 51) In my case I couldn't do that a part from helping them to split firewood which is sometimes done by Mater's children, the rest of works is purely female. They always complaining about how hard it is to make beer in general but I could just observe, I can't really feel it.

It was amazing how I became myself also a faithful customer of the cabaret through patience and daily negotiation. I mean by negotiation here my ability to be accepted and understood which made me also understand their everyday life.

By staying with them for some time without taking any picture to get some routine before shooting, and then negotiate everything, every event as it came or by trying to guess; to discuss

what could be the next event and how to grasp it. This is how I got close to my informant's family and their activity.

Apart from these approaches or techniques I mentioned and the use of the camera, the rest of information was collected through daily conversation with other people about beer brewers, sometimes I had tried to get some life story from other women who were willing to share with me.

### **3.3.2. Research permit and ethic problems**

Though I had the place to do my research and the informants, there was still something important missing and that was the need of a research permit, which would legalize my work in the community. The person who was to give the signature (the Provincial Delegate of culture) was absent. I spend some days, almost one week he did not show up. The Vice Delegate didn't want to sign my application. He asked me to wait for the Delegate personally maybe I could make some agreement with him. His reason was that he did not want me to do my film in the cabaret. He was so clear while saying: *"I don't know how you students, you are choosing topics of research"*. He said that I should not choose to make a film in the cabaret or about *bilbil*. Making documentary in the cabaret could be dangerous for me and for them. For me because, I am not secured with my camera, it could be destroyed by anyone drunk or bad-intentioned, it could be taken by the police etc... Giving me an authorization could be hazardous for them because they are scared about the authority. He argued that: *"nowadays everyone can go to the cabaret of bilbil. It is not only for lower class of people or for poor people. Therefore, I could film any "big" administrator or any important authorities. Their service will be blamed for permitting me to do that. It is better to wait for the delegate itself and discuss with him."*

I was a little bit discouraged but not as to change my project. I tried to explain to him, how I would manage to avoid such problems. I told him that I was not concerned with who is important or unimportant person, my objective is to follow a woman making *bilbil*; in a case I need to film drinkers I would try to ask for their approval first. After almost one hour he decides to sign the famous application of research permit.

From this situation I became more aware of the ethic problem I am going to deal with during the filming process. Because from his speech, the cabaret of millet beer seems to be stigmatized as a drinking place for poor people, while people who had certain responsibility in

the Cameroon administration should not be there. They should drink imported drink like champagne, wine or imported beer in a comfortable place which fit to their image and celebrity in the society. But he as well recognized that, most of these kinds of people are also faithful customer of millet beer as I could discover myself. Then their image should not be advertised in the media production. This reaction from the office, about making film in the cabaret, was sometimes repeated or expressed by certain customers in the cabaret, but with the time I spent there, explaining with pleasure what I am doing, sharing beer together with people this was not a problem at all.

### **3.4. The use of the Camera and the development of film idea**

#### ***3.4.1. Filming in the cabaret***

The first day I introduced the camera, I met some ill-reactions. The first is that the second wife Mater's co-wife i.e. Rachel did not want to be filmed. When I asked her why, she told me: *"My son you do not know my position in this family. I just insist to be here, if not they do not want me to be here, don't take a picture of me with them."* I did not ask more, I felt that she is a little bit shy but she was more in bad mood this day. As a second wife she can mean by position the way she can be marginalized within the family or be an object of jealousy for the first wife, which is common problem within polygamy family in this society. I took some days to familiarize them with the camera by following them when they prepared beer or I could just come to their place stay with them always with all my equipment. At the end they named me the *"man with the baby on the back"*. I did some of this exercise not the day they sold *bilbil*.

The first day I shot when people were drinking. I arrived there around seven 07 o'clock expecting to be the first before customer, but some customers were already there. I installed the camera. The first impression I got was a lot of curiosity. I began to do some test shooting. My informant began to advertise the "miracle" of what I was doing with the camera. Everyone wanted to come to me and be captured in the screen of my camera. They want to see what I am doing and how. I show them some clips I already took. Then stop filming for the rest of the day and just trying to expose my camera, myself, by the way my entire project about beer making. Few minutes later, one of my friends who knew my project initiated a debate about the *bilbil*. They had been evoking a nutritional, social and even political issue of *bilbil*. From this first day I could film some relevant talk but I realized it was hard technically to get clearly what they said.

People talked at the same time, everyone wanted to say something. The camera was triggering more reaction, but that is how the cabaret is sometimes even without camera. I should just find the way to get what I considered as useful for film and information for my text within this ambiance of the cabaret. In some case, the sound recorder could help me to select clear speech, but the use of boom increase the appetite of curiosity.

What I wanted to underline also here is that when some peoples or friends got to know what you wanted, they would always try to satisfy you, but sometimes they profited from the presence of camera to express their own problem. They tried to address some message to the audience about something they didn't have a chance to express, they believe on how the camera can bring far their message. The youth discussed the problems of unemployment in Cameroon, or about democracy in the film le "Cabaret de la Mater" Show some of unexpected debate in my film but I felt it was more developed because of the presence of the camera.

I was first trying to get to film the natural situation, the natural conversation in the cabaret. I mean by natural conversation a flow of discourse without being affected by the presence of the camera. This I observed was impossible.

The problem of filming in the cabaret was also occasioned by the fact that everyone tried to bring his own prejudice about camera, about pictures. For some, I was to sell their pictures to TV program in Europe and make money. I have to give them their part. Some people talked for instance of tourists who used to give them money for anything they (the tourists) needed. It could be for taking picture, or any kind of information they needed. For others, the fact that I was from Europe meant that I had money to share with them or to pay them. Some asked me to recruit them as actors, because they have played some roles in some movies made in the region.

Other research problem I encountered was that some people thought I paid the family I was doing my fieldwork with or I was a journalist from European channel, and so they came to me and presented their activity. They asked me if I could film them, they still had a lot to tell me about their difficulties which is never be understood by the local TV. People came from outside and they wanted to be filmed. I remember one hold woman asked me I could come to her house and take picture s of her cooking and also film her making *Arki* and so one.

I met these problems more with drinkers or other people and not the members of family I was making my film. They never asked me to pay them for what I did at their place. But



sometime I felt that this multiple debates about camera or picture, money could affect them because some of them gossiped to me that: “this is what people say, this is what people think...” This is what I face almost all the two or three first weeks filming even all during my stay before some people got boring with having nothing, of hearing that I was a student. This could shape also the quality of the film I could make with the material I got in the wake of these situations. Facing these situations, I found out that doing research with camera is not only just a pleasure of shooting or of being behind this ‘great equipment’ like ‘others’ think, but, it rather requires a lot of stress and patience . As Barbash and Taylor notice “*Filming is always a stressful affair, requiring continual give-and-take, and any tensions within your crew will be communicated instantly to your subjects*”. (Barbash and Taylor: 1997:72)

### **3.4.2. Film idea**

I aimed to make a film dealing with the commerce of millet beer. The story of film concerns Bava’s wives with the first wife (Mater) as the main actress. My basic idea is to show how they organize the activity of brewing beer: making and selling beer and the dynamism of women.

My plan concerning the film style was to use in term of framing, the responsive camera approach. This approach developed by David Mac Dougall (2006:4), let us “*observes and interprets its subject without provoking or disturbing it*”, but in the field the reality is not always what we think we could do. I can try to observe, to hear everything but the camera, which I like to use it as my eyes, can’t be useful as my eyes in the cabaret. Because it has more effect than my eyes, it has many stereotypes: “TV productions, take image for internet, commercialization of picture, white miracle”. But sometimes, the camera is also stronger than my eyes because as I already mentioned above, people believe on how far it can bring what they want to transmit to the rest of the world from their experience. These are the problems we have to challenge or accept before succeeding how we want to orient our film. From this point of view, I could conclude Barbash & Taylor that, according to this experience of filming in the cabaret:

“*In documentary filmmaking, style is not something that you should definitively, decide on in advance. Filmmakers have individual techniques to be sure, but your film style should also be a response to what you find in front of the camera*” (Barbash & Taylor: 1997:73). I felt more and more that it could be hard for me to realize a kind of film I needed. The film where at the

same time, has “*respect*” for the subjects but where the camera seems to be hidden. A film as Pitter Crawford call “*unforced story –telling*”<sup>13</sup>, while commenting Celso *and Cora*; a film by Gary Kildea, I mean a film that would be purely observational. I can then say that I have ended up with observational camera style.

Concerning the story of the film itself, I could also say that I got to know more than I expected. I had planned to deal with the problem of the importance of beer brewing activity for women by trying to get as much as possible their point of view around the process of beer brewing, but actually the film give also some more idea about the daily life of other peoples in this society. The cabaret is a place where people from different backgrounds, different statuses share and discuss the complexity of everyday life. Rather than being just a drinking place, the cabaret is also a ‘parliament’ of people, it is a mirror of people life in this milieu.

The film helps us to understand the life still of these peoples (beer makers and consumers) in this milieu or society. Through the discussion in this little yard of cabaret, we could understand the universal question of youth and their hope for the future, the actuality about the trend of politics in the world, all these without missing our focus on the main actor (beer brewer) and the issue of economy and gender in the household. But as Postma and Crawford (2006:3) notice, I also recognise that: “*the ethnographic film can never explain the full cultural context and multiple layered meanings of the events, objects, social roles of the participant, etc.*”(Postma and Crawford 2006:3) To complete some of issues I mentioned, the present thesis will try to follow the same problematic of the film but could not go deeply to the issue of the discussion about politics or youth and their hope for the future. This could be present in the text as social importance of the cabaret. The main discussion in the text could be mostly based on the issue of gender and their problem access to economic independence through the daily life struggles in the milieu of northern Cameroon but it is not also clear in the film.

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<sup>13</sup> - Peter I. Crawford (Nordic Anthropological Film Association, NAFA) “Respect the moment! A retrospective of cinematographic work of Gary Kildea” p.4

## CHAPTER4: BREWING BILBIL: A CONTROVERSIAL ACTIVITY

This chapter discusses the production of beer in the Northern part of Cameroon in general. I will therefore discuss the diverse points of views related to the prevalence of this activity in this milieu. I would also point out the ritual consideration of beer in Mafa society. To achieve this, I will use my own knowledge and experience from this society which I belong to. The main preoccupation in this chapter is to underline some difficulties women face by doing this activity. However, despite these difficulties, brewing beer still remains a preferred choice as a self employment for rural women living in the merge of the city in this region of Cameroon.

### 4.1. Bilbil: from ritual use to the cash sphere.

#### 4.1.1. *The ritual use of bilbil*

Called *zom* in Mafa, *uzum* in Guiziga, *dong-long* in Toupuri etc... each ethnic group has unique name for this drink, but the term *bilbil* is usually used as common concept in certain urban or outskirts of urban milieu to refer to this drink from millet's seeds. In general, *bilbil* is a beer mainly produced by non Moslem populations of the province of the extreme-North of Cameroun. In general the millet beer has religious and socio cultural relevance which one finds in a number of anthropological studies relating to the drink, it is reserved for the sphere of sacred, it is controlled by the elders, and it is inaccessible to the women. (Jolly, E.2006).This is the widely held view about the traditional place of beer in many studies of African societies.

Jaouen, a catholic priest who has worked for many years among the Guiziga, an ethnic group close to Mafa, proposes to the Christian community in his book called "*L'Eucharistie du mil*" (1995) to use local beer and local food to celebrate mass. He argues that millet beer is much closer to the hearts of these people than Christian wine used in the church for the mass. This explains the important role of millet beer in the cultural manifestation of people's life. In addition to this idea of the importance of millet beer developed by Jaouen, Muller- Kosack confirms in the case of Mafa that: "*Ceremonial beer is the "Eucharist" of Mafa religion. It represents the link between God, the ancestors and the living within a patrilocal community. The "way of the beer" begins with those who have a deceased father and who are therefore responsible for the ceremony of the sacred pot called baba, and ends with the mountain priest (biy dza) who libates beer at sacred site of his local kin*" (Muller- Kosack, 2001:11).

“*The way of beer*” of Muller- Kosack analyses how the Mafa re-enact their history in the ritual transfer of sorghum beer from junior to senior members of their society.

We can understand the importance or the place of sorghum beer in the Mafa tradition also through the significance of the seed of millet itself for this people. According to the local believes, a part some large trees, “*millet is probably the only plant that has a soul, like humans*” (Jaouen, R. 1995:48). Millet is food and drink. It is considered as symbol of life itself. The oral literature such as myths, tales, songs, proverbs...remind the importance of this foodstuff. The importance Mafa assigns to millet can be illustrated also by the way millet is accompanied by many rituals during its production; this from sowing until harvesting.

From this, we can conclude that millet is essential in Mafa tradition through the ceremonies and rituals which accompany the people’s lives their main activities which is growing millet. These are some ideas which explain the fact that, the importance of millet beer is mostly perceived as traditional matter rather than commercial, but today we can’t separate the production of millet beer from the study of women’s small resourcefulness in many contemporary African societies.

#### ***4.1.2. Integration of bilbil into cash sphere***

It is not known exactly when *bilbil* was begun to be sold. Most of research has shown that it is of great importance in some African traditions (ritual, ceremony...) though this claim does not dispute that it was sold. I was also at the beginning of this research of the view that beer was not sold before. But I couldn’t maintain this idea because I don’t have the exact time people begin to sell millet beer. While asking some old people about how the beer production was before, they mostly referred to the amount of money they were using, they simply replied that they were using less money, beer was cheaper than today or they were just exchanging beer with millet and other products.

My aim in this part of work is to try to give an idea about the development of beer brewing as a main activity of women from the far north province of Cameroon, how it is growing from rural or “pagan” milieu to urban or “Muslim” milieu, from north the south parts of Cameroon through the migration of people, in the course of a struggle for survival.

If we take the case of Maroua where I did my field work, according to Seignobos (2002), *bilbil* was already sold since the establishment of the first small markets in the “pagan” region

from 1930 to 1960. Seignobos's article: "*Thirty years of millet beer in Maroua; from Sare of bilbil to the bar*" (my translation) discuss the persistence and the development of this activity in spite of multiple voices which opposes to the excessive production of beer in Far North Province of Cameroon precisely in Maroua.

In one hand this persistence explains the role of this activity in the economy of survival on the fringes of the city, that is, in the local politic of the region. Beer activity was contributing to the growing of the city of Maroua. Seignobos (2002 ) noticed that "*Today still, the Lamido (a term from Fulani which refer to the high traditional authority) of Maroua, which knows how to count among the mountain migrants his most faithful supports, never stop to protect districts with beer from the tactless racket of others authority*"<sup>14</sup> .

Despite the fact that the general point of view of people about beer would like that the consumption of alcohol needs to be controlled, this activity is developing more and more in the Northern Cameroon and progressively in other areas of the country. The progression of beer brewing beyond the cities of Cameroon is the most innovative thing than its commerce it self. We could understand this evolution of beer brewing from rural area to urban milieu from Barth (1972) perspective of entrepreneurship. He defines his approach by three main concepts:

- "Niche" (the position which the entrepreneur occupies in relation to resources, competitors, and clients) which I consider to be the position women occupy within the household or society in relation to the men.
- "Asset" (sum total of capital, skills, and social claims which the entrepreneur may employ) which I consider to be all strategies of negotiations women are using to succeed in their activities of beer brewing.
- "Restrictions" which limit his freedom of choice within his niche. This could refer to what I will call later coalition against *bilbil* and which refer to all structure and opinion against beer production in general in this part of Cameroon.

Through this commerce of millet beer, we can consider that some Mafa women as many others women belonging to this area have defined their way of social mobility through the commerce of *bilbil*. From this point of view, beer brewing can be considered as one of the

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<sup>14</sup> - My translation from French source

activities who has contributed to bring Mafa women from “their kitchen” or domestic world through something from this kitchen to the rest of the world.

In conclusion we can say that by brewing beer, these women have broken what Barth (1970) calls *boundaries* developed in the analysis of gender relation by Gerson (1984). In this context, the concept of boundaries concern the critics towards the development of the idea of separate spheres in the social science literature which concerns the assignment of women to the domestic realm, men to the public one, the physical separation between both spheres, and the social prestige attached to the public domain. Gerson underline that “*the dichotomy of separate spheres tends to simplify and reduce social life to two discrete physical environments without capturing the complexity of social and cultural divisions.*” In this sense talking about breaking boundaries means as we can understand from both, Barth and Gerson’s perspectives, is the opportunity these women get to access not only the public sphere (a male place) through their activity of beer brewing, but also to have a separate income which allow them to access certain role (providing food for family) or goods (having her own house) belonging to the men domains and responsibility. This confirm Barth idea that boundaries of societies or sphere **which** may be not only relative but also "permeable" in the sense that people may permanently cross into another.

#### ***4.1.3. Glance on the evolution and forms of cabaret from Rural to Urban***

In spite of all the various opinions which oppose the practice of this activity, it gains more and more popularity in terms of survival economy in the rural area as in town in this part of Cameroon. During the dry season in the rural area almost all women are brewing beer, because they have almost nothing to do. Their main activity (farming) is ended. Women often take advantage of this period when they are waiting for the next rainy season to save money by producing the *bilbil*. This practice is maintained by many small markets based on this activity of *bilbil* created in almost every hidden recess of the village in rural area. The more we move towards the urban environment, the more it seems more organized and more professional. Many women have made this activity, their profession. According to Seignobos (2002), there were already about seven hundred women brewing beer in Maroua in 1970 and about one thousand two hundred in 2001. As many other women from other ethnics group (Toupuri Moundang, Guiziga, Mufu, Ngamby...), we could conclude like Ngriya, a friend of my informant said, “*we Mafa women here it is only beer we are making and what we can make*”. Then we should ask

why it is only beer, but the answers are always almost the same. *“There is nothing else to do”* Maybe this “nothing to do” has to do with their background. In general, these women are part of the young generation, who have stopped schooling and do not have a job. They have never been to school, they never learn to do something more than farming and ‘making food’.

The first type of cabaret or *bilbil* production is made in the household and sold in the same place. Here the production is not usually in big quantities. The beer is produced once a week and serves as a source of income for the housewife during the dry season. Here, the household becomes a “periodic bar”. People come and drink beer at home. Some heads of the family do not like such activity at home because according to them it creates some problem of insecurity. Accordingly, they usually put structures a bit away from home for the woman to use for this purpose.

Also there are instances in which beer is made at home and sold in the local market. It is a place in the village where people gather once or twice a week to buy some small products such as sugar, salt, soap, matches etc...imported from the city, but also to sell some local product and food. The main local product of this kind of market is millet beer. Every woman who has made the beer brings it there, and clients have a choice to buy whichever one tastes good to them. Here, the market becomes a place for appointment. In the past such a market took place only once a week per village, but nowadays, we have so many markets of *bilbil* as the number of the quarters we can have in the same village and even more because now the same market can take place more than once a week. This is because each market is owned by the chief of the quarter called *Djaouro* and the market is named after him.

The third form of cabaret has a feature of bar dancing. The only difference here is the fact that they serve only *bilbil* or *Arki* instead of imported beer. This is a great opportunity for those who do not have enough means and even for those who have. As said one regular customer of the milieu: *“it is always good when we spend little and consume too much. The quality doesn't matter, the point is to get drunk and relax ”*. Here the beer is cheap. With 100 to 500fr you drink well, you dance as much as you could do the same in the bar. Several women can make a group and use the same place which they rent to prepare beer. Each of them has her day for selling. One woman can recruit other girls or women to work for her. Then she just supervises her employees. This form of cabaret is more developed in the urban area.

Thus from the rural area to the urban environment the production of the millet beer became one of the important symbols of informal economy by women in the region of Far North Province of Cameroon. Now we can even find it in big city of Cameroon like Yaoundé and Douala as underlined this quotation from Cameroon web page<sup>15</sup> on the 23 October 2002:

*“The drink originating in North is consumed from now in any corner of street of the large metropolises of our country. Reasons of its success: his quality-price ratio appears it...It is around 4 pm that the “life” starts at the enclosure located in old BICIC of the Park in Yaoundé. Women from north, draped in their loincloths with the shimmering colors settle. They have as goods some full buckets and water-bottles. The contents of these vases, bilbil, such as honey attract bees is the object of covetousness of accustomed with the milieu. Such as a powder trail, the place becomes black at once of people, changing with time into small fair, as in our villages. Braised watches, shoes, cigarettes, clothing, plantains and safou roasted... are exposed. Here, one negotiates, discuss and sells. It is also the place of meeting, where one can have the fresh news of the village. Such as a secret society, the knowledge of some words in Fulany such as "Djam' Na, djam débo, djam saré [Are you okay, are you okay woman? Is the family is okay...?] is one of the criteria introducing the visitor easily into the circle...”<sup>16</sup>*

This is how the activity is growing from rural to urban milieu and big metropolitan areas of Cameroon. From the aforementioned, we can say that the production of *bilbil* is one of the activity which is growing fast and well, but women are facing a lot of opposition from sections of the public on this activity. Administration, NGO and certain religions are against it, but they have not succeeded so far in stopping its progression. The production of *bilbil* has been integrated into the daily lives of the people. Notwithstanding the opposition, there are as well some people within the society who support the production of *bilbil*. It cannot be stopped because, brewing beer seems to be the main economic venture of rural women.

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<sup>15</sup> -[www.cameroun.info.net](http://www.cameroun.info.net)

<sup>16</sup> - My translation from French to English



## 4.2. Coalition against *bilbil*

### 4.2.1. Tradition and religions

The local tradition<sup>17</sup> is complaining about the devaluation of the custom of the beer because as I said previously, beer was made in the past more for the purposes of ceremonies or cultural ceremonies and common work. The consumption of beer was strictly controlled by the old generation to the point that the young people and the women had no much access to it. This discussion about the control of drinking has been also developed by Jolly (2006) in his study in Dogon society in Mali.

Mafa society is a stratified society according to the sex, clan and ages. They usually drink ritual or ceremonial beer (even sometimes non ritual) beer according to this stratification. For example when there is more than one people drinking beer, they will always check who is the eldest and which clan he belongs to, to taste the beer first before the rest of people can drink. In the cabaret there is not such rule, or distinction. Everybody is around the jar, men and women alike, a young people and the old men. Peoples are also coming from different ethnic group with different culture; there is no way to respect this or that rule, but still some old generation are trying to remind some of these rules to the youth while drinking together by claiming that this should taste beer first before the younger. But the cabaret in this context remain as “*a space of personal freedom where each can distinguish himself/herself, by escaping the social pressure based on the age, gender differentiation, kinship or other social stratification and discrimination*”<sup>18</sup> (Jolly, 2006:1)

With regard to the religions (Islam, protestant and catholic), their point of view depends of their doctrine. But the common view is that, the problem of alcoholism impacts on both on the drinker and the society at large. It is therefore common to see priests protesting against the use of alcohol.

For instance, Father Felix who is a priest in the diocese of Maroua appreciated my work when I told him that my research project was about *bilbil* production. I further explained to him the way the mode of my data collection: collecting data through participant observation, and filming in the cabaret. He appreciated the project but he was not satisfied with my way of

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<sup>17</sup> -Mafa tradition or any other ethnic group where millet beer plays some great role in their tradition in the northern Cameroon

<sup>18</sup> My translation from French into English

perceiving the problem of beer brewing activity. According to him, we can see the impact of beer brewing in the society by just focusing on how things go on in the cabaret. He said, “*People look always fine in the cabaret. There, they are not showing the bad side of beer drinking. In the cabaret they are laughing, joking, playing, everything seems fine, but at home, in the family it is something else. To know this you should approach housewives and children. They are victims and witnesses of the problem of beer brewing*” .This thought is just a repetition of common debate about the effect of alcohol in the society.

In this issue, it has been organised in the diocese of Maroua-Mokolo in 2003 a competition called “*Diocesan completion of best realisation to earn money without making bilbil*”<sup>19</sup>. The purpose of this competition was to encourage women toward other activities different from beer but as the organiser told me after few months after the completion none of the activities which won the price has been developed.

#### **4.2.2. NGO and Administration**

Besides, certain NGOs see in the beer of millet, the source of many problems in the Northern Cameroon. They suffer almost every year, of food shortage or starvation, because they use the same product for the food supply It is the part of country which has hard climate (less rain) and relief (a lot of mountain), and then people have less possibility to produce necessaries resources for survival. What they produce can be enough for food but maybe not for drink also. They underline also a problem of environment. For them the breweries of beer can be a one of the cause of desertification through the excessive usage of wood for this activity.

For the administration point of view, they are more concerned with the propensity of the debits of *bilbil*, its impacts on the society which is not far from the religious point of view I already mentioned above. The authorities of the place have tried to forbid the production of beer, but all their efforts have been in vain. It is still not changing its propensity. They change the idea now by asking women to pay taxes for this activity, which contributes also to its progressive acceptance as formal economy in this part of Cameroon.

From all this discourse, I had the impression of how these women fight to enter [system of separate incomes](#). They have to challenge not only the pressure of their husbands who

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<sup>19</sup> -My translation

traditionally hardly accept that their wives to do such activity rather than “taking care of the household”. Their insistence in doing this activity convinced me that, it plays some important role in their lives. For me, this is a way for them to participate in the sphere of resourcefulness, to be also out of the “kitchen” or out of the domestic preoccupation and try to access the public sphere where they were almost absent. Then the question as to the strategies used to preserve this activity or the persistence of this activity in this milieu remains to be answered.

### **4.3. The persistence of the activity of beer brewing and social function of cabaret.**

Despite the idea against the prevalence of the activity of beer brewing, some share the opinion that brewing beer can be one way to give value to the local product (the millet). For others, one cannot neglect the social function the cabaret itself plays in this society.

#### ***4.3.1. Beer brewing and the commerce of millet***

This idea about the relation between beer brewing and the commerce of millet is related to some literature concerning the interest of the commercialization and transformation of local product. Although several people have touched on this issue, I assume that the work of Mahir Saul is what will be relevant for this section of the study.

Mahir (1981) draws her attention to the volume of monetary transactions and profits within the traditional sector of a farming community in West Africa. Her article focus on the production, distribution and pricing of local brews, it points to the effect of beer making on farming, and relates trade to contemporary developments in other spheres of social and economic life. This idea can be connected in this work to the point of view of those who are still favorable for the production of traditional beer in the Far North Province of Cameroon. Because they think we should rather appreciate the knowledge of transformation of local materials into comestible and commercial purpose. It could be the way to valorize this farm product: the millet which is the main activity from century to century and the structure of development never think about his transformation or his development. This is what people from the milieu of Extreme North Cameroon know or can do; growing millet is their ‘civilization’. From this point of view I have been questioned by one of my informants, on what people will do with the quantity of millet they produce if they are not using for beer. I could not answer this question and I could never if I have just tried to refer to the quantity they use for brewing. My focus at this time was just to know

about the priority of millet they could give to food supply compared to beer production, but actually they never thought that beer production is a main reason for scarcity of food. Concerning this situation Mater, my informant told me that they were forbidden to make beer during the time of famine, but they realize that “*without beer a lot people were starving.*” This seems confusing but her explanation is that, “*it was easier for people to get something to drink with small amount of money than to get something to eat. Some people can just survive by drinking some millet beer for some days before they can get normal food.*”

Ones could ask then here were they get the money for drink and not for food, the answer has been always in the cabaret we share. This notion of *sharing* is so important in the cabaret. I will say it is the fundamental support core of the relation in the cabaret. “*Bilbil is easily to share than beer bottle. Several people can drink a small quantity of bilbil, which is not possible with beer. It says that only Chadian people can use many glass for one bottle of beer.*”<sup>20</sup> This is an elementary idea which sustains this community around the calabash of *bilbil*. Here it is a “bad behavior” to drink alone. No need to have too much money to be here. The point is not about enjoying the drink only, but mostly being with other to get away from the daily stress.

#### **4.3.2. The social function of cabaret**

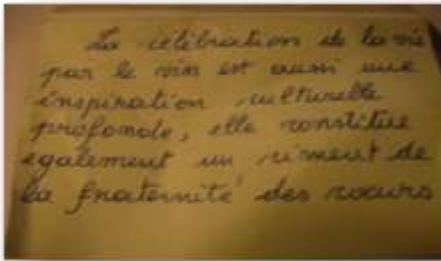
On day after I had spent some time in the cabaret, at the end of the day, I went to visit one of my friends who I had met there. His name is Pascal. He is about 30 years old. He has finished with bachelor in biology in the same University I have been to before also. On the way to his place he told me: “*you guys are lucky at least to keep studying. We, we do spend more our time like you see in the cabaret. No way to study, no job we don't know what we are going to be, time is passing too...*” It was hard for me to discuss this with him, because this is actually approaching again the dilemma about beer activity. One could easily ask here if setting in the cabaret is the solution as they used to discuss in the cabaret, but they never themselves found the solution to this preoccupation<sup>21</sup>. I tried to sympathize with him and have also to raise the issue of cabaret importance for him. We came to his place, still continuing talking about beer, alcohol, cabaret etc...he showed me some pictures of him with his friends. Behind most of each picture

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<sup>20</sup> - Quotation from a customer in the cabaret.

<sup>21</sup> - See film *Le Cabaret de la Mater*.

he used to put some note. In one of the picture I found this note which translated into English means:



*"The celebration of the life by the wine is also a deep cultural inspiration; it also establishes a cement of the brotherhood of hearts."* After sometime, within my stay in the milieu, I tried to get the sense of what he meant by this quotation. I did this by paying some more attention to the daily lives of customers in the cabaret rather than just

following the beer maker only. This helped me not to isolate my main focus but also get the importance of this activity in other perspective. I mean by importance here the social function of cabaret which is not only a place to drink and eat but as we can see in the film *le Cabaret de la mater*, it is a place where people from all backgrounds and stations gather to debate the complexities of life, politics; it serves too as a neighbourhood "parliament" of the people as I have already mentioned so far in the film idea.

Eric jolly discussed also this situation in his article "*bars and cabarets in Dogon city, drinking alone or in common*"<sup>22</sup>. He presents the cabaret as a place for individual freedom. I find out that this article can be a quite well description of some sequence of the film "*le Cabaret de la Mater*".

#### **Figure7: Picture from the cabaret by the author**



As we commented in the film synopsis "*Mater's pub is not just for eating, drinking and making merry, it serves too as a neighbourhood "parliament" of the people*"<sup>23</sup>

From there I found out that, despite the critics behind the beer activity, people actually need it to share their daily stress. As

<sup>22</sup> - My translation of French title *Bars et Cabaret du pays Dogon; un boire individuel ou communautaire*

<sup>23</sup> - Gary Kildea, the director of the film "*Le cabaret de la Mater*" (Mater's Pub) used the concept of parliament while commenting the film.

long as they do not exaggerate the consumption, it is difficult to sense the danger which this activity constitutes as others (what I call coalition against beer brewing) think for this society, even if one cannot pretend to deny it totally also.

We can conclude here that, the attraction or the role the cabaret is actually plays, added to the low price of millet beer compared to the 'modern beer'; the cultural aspect of beer; the sociability around the beer, can be some of the reasons which could explain the success of this activity instead of the opposition we described above.

If we consider then that, the activity of brewing *bilbil* is growing fast and women are more and more involved, we could ask also how this business is important for them. What is the income they can get from this activity, how are they managing their income. By following some examples of them, while doing my fieldwork, we could get some idea about this preoccupation in this following part of my thesis.

## **CHAPTER 5: DAILY OCCUPATION OF BAVA’S HOUSEHOLD MEMBER**

Bava’s household is the family I spent most of my time during my fieldwork. This chapter gives some idea about the composition of the family. It presents also what the members of the household are doing to earn their living.

### **5.1. Presentation of the family members**

Mater and Rachel are the wives of Bava. Mater is the first wife. Her real name is Kandaya Elisabeth but I used to call her Mater which means “mother” like most youngsters used to call her in the area. This has to do with her appearance and personality. I noticed that only her husband used to call her with her real name Kandaya. Her co-wife and other women from the area call her Dada Weleme (the mother of Weleme). She is the mother of the two boys in the family: Weleme and Gueleo.

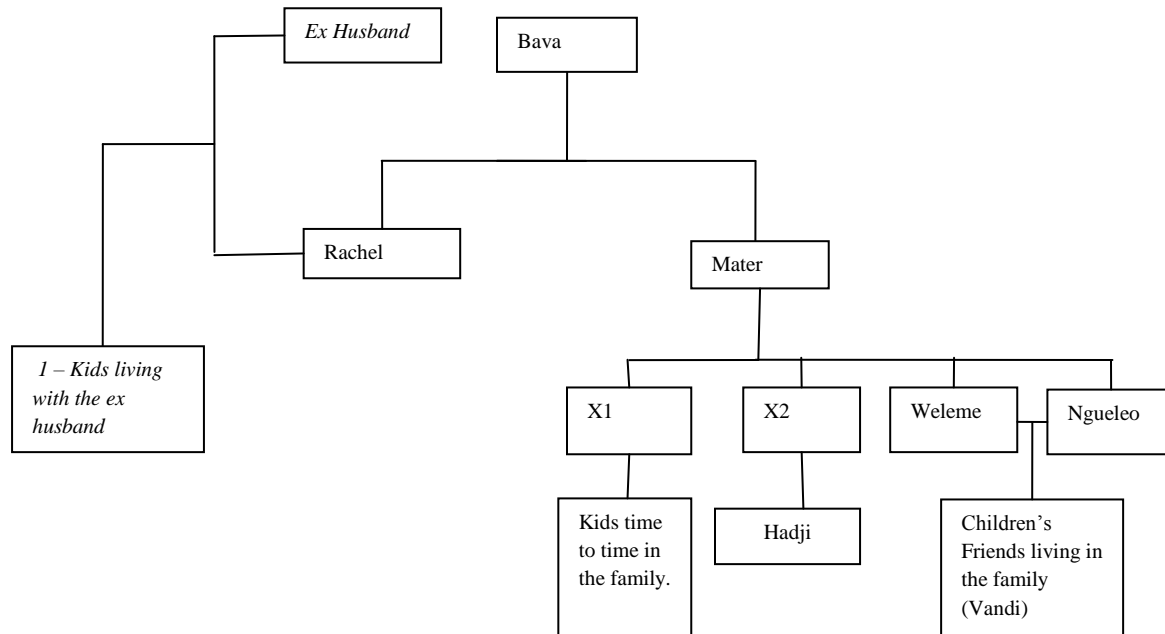
Rachel Ndeodamay is the second wife. She does not have kids in this family. She had with her ex husband.

Weleme is about 29 years old. He is the elder boy of the family after having lost his two older sisters who were both married. One of them was the mother of the small girl Hadji who is actually living also in the family. She is about 12 years old. I was thinking at the beginning that she was the sister of the two boys, but not. Mater is her grand mother.

Ngeleo is the youngest of the family. He has obtained his High School Diploma in 2006 but he couldn’t go to university. He has no job also.

Augustin Vandi is one of the permanent members of the family also but, his relationship with the family is just one of friendship. He is from Kapsiki, a neighboring ethnic group of Mafa. He was looking for the place to stay while he was a student. Then the family offered him the possibility to share the room with the boys in the family. He is not anymore a student; he is looking for a job in Maroua. He spends also his time with friend in the cabaret. He was going time to time at home (village) to get some food. Below is the structure of the family.

**Figure 8: Diagram of Bava’s family**



**X1** and **X2** are the deceased daughters of Bava and Mater

**5.2. Daily occupations of the family members**

The time I was in the family doing my fieldwork, I could see day after day, week after week almost the same routine, the same activity in the family. As I already mentioned, the two boys of the family had nothing to do. They are both jobless. Their survival depends on what their parent can provide for the family. Here below is some idea about their daily occupation.

**5.2.1. Children situation in the family**

Weleme had worked as a “Moto taxi driver” before. However, he had some problem and the owner of motorcycle took his engine back. Weleme him self feel embarrassed about his situation in the family. Many time he used to repeat that: *“God is unfair: why others is working and why other did not work, why others are rich and others poor, why others are black and some are white”*. On day he told me also that he had a discussion in the cabaret with one costumer and he was really hurt when the guy asked him *“what is he waiting for at this age in his father house, that he is too old to eat his parent food, it is time to help his old parents”*. This situation of lack of jobs is the main problem of the youth of his age in the milieu. It is their main shared daily frustration. Their situation in the context of household becomes sometime source of tension



within the family because it is easier to treat them as lazy as long as they do not have any contribution to the family as members.

I didn't get to discuss too much with Ngueleo the youngest boy of the family. He had spent less time at home. He takes no alcohol and sometimes helps the father at sometimes his father at his job place.

Hadji the small girl is still spending most of her times with Mater and Rachel at home, helping them in the kitchen, and brewing beer. As I already mention she is makes beer for also herself from time to time who according to Mater helps her for her clothes and school<sup>24</sup>

### **5.2.2. Bava's occupation**

Bava the head of the family works day and night as a security guard in the office of PARFAR (*Programme d'Amélioration du Revenu Familial Rural dans les provinces septentrionales du Cameroun*). It is project related to cooperation between Cameroon and African Development Bank (FAD). He is rarely seen at home, except during the day from nine in the morning to three in the evening. As he told me he spends all the time in his job place. He is a security guard in the night; he is office messenger during the day, he plays also the role of cleaner. He complained about his situation because he said that he got one salary though he did three different jobs. This is an excerpt from his speech while complaining at the same time about his job and also his family. This day he said to me:

*“Here I am working tree job but one salary. I am security guard during the night, I am office messenger during the day; it is me who is doing the job of cleaning. This is painful; I do it because I don't have choice. The boss tells me if you don't want I will choose another person. He is controlling me to much. I don't have rest. He underlines also his pain about not eating well because he does not have too much time to come all the time and it at home. He eats only once a day at home. Sometimes the small girl Hadji has to send his food to his workplace.*

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<sup>24</sup> - for next year because the time I was in the field she was not going to school she failed the exam entrance in to 6<sup>eme</sup> ( first year in secondary school)

### 5.2.3. *Mater's and Rachel's occupation*

Concerning the two wives, their main daily occupation is almost the same everyday. To present this I will begin by summarizing and excerpt on three successive days from my diary from the beginning of my field work. I couldn't certainly write down all the details of the day but just to get an idea about how it looks like how they express themselves, this routine.

On one occasion, I visited my main informant and her family. It was the day for Mater's beer and it is the day of what I call the first step of cooking. Because making beer has two times of cooking before fermentation. I wanted to film this process. Rachel was drying Millet outside the building (Cf. Picture). I greeted her, my camera on my back. Then I went inside the house to leave it under the hangar in front of their bedrooms, the place where they cook and sell *bilbil*. It is a "cabaret". It was quiet, nobody inside. Then I went out with my small camera to stay with Rachel. She told me that Mater went to the mill to crush the millet for her *bilbil*. The two boys in the family were sleeping. Bava the head of the family had not come home from work yet. I took some still photo of her. She was scattering the seeds of millet on a big tarpaulin of plastic (cf. picture above). At the same moment when she worked we talked. She said to me if you do not crush the millet the day before, then you should go very early in the morning to not waste time. There are not too many mills in the place and many women are making the *bilbil*, others are going to make flour for food. Then it is necessary to take advantage in the morning to help you do other things. For example draw the water for the wine, for the housework, make food etc...Then it is time for cooking *bilbil* and the day is finished. So we don't have rest.

We kept talking, few minutes later, Weleme one of the boys from the family comes out, the time Mater just went back also from the mill and Bava from work around half past nine in the morning. Rachel began to make food around 11 o'clock, whilst Mater began to soak the floor in the water. The time for food to be ready, the time they are eating was enough to begin also cooking beer just after, the first step of brewing *bilbil*.

Half of the day was already gone at this time and the rest of the day would be for the control of beer till it is finished to be cooked by night. At the same time Rachel is still controlling her millet in the sun. The next day (Wednesday) the same routine begins. Get up early in the morning, getting water for Rachel *bilbil* first step of cooking, going to the mill if she didn't go the day before, squeezing Mater Beer for second step of cooking.

Thursday Mater spends the day selling her beer, while Rachel boils and makes new beer ready for Friday. The rest of the day Saturday, Sunday is for renewing the millet, wood and other small task in the household. Sometimes, they help the small girl to make her beer. She used to make it for Tuesdays. The tableau below presents their week activities. Haidamy in the tableau is another woman who is renting the place to make her beer when Mater and Rachel are not making.

**Figure9: Program of making beer in Bava house**

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Cooking 1</b>		MATER 1 <sup>st</sup> wife	Rachel 2nd wife		H Aidamay She is not living in the family		HADJI The small girl (she is cooking rarely)
<b>Cooking2</b>	HADJI		MATER	RACHEL		H Aidamay	
<b>Selling days</b>		HADJI		MATER	RACHEL		H Aidamay

**Cooking1**= first day of cooking beer

**Cooking 2**= second day of cooking beer

(NB: After cooking2, the beer will be fermented during the night and it will be ready for selling the next day.)

This is how I can present the time schedule for mater and Rachel cabaret. The empty space in the time schedule is used for providing the necessary for the beer making (millet and woods) and other task in the household.

The hardest part of the job as they explained is to squeeze manually about two hundred litter of beer mixture. They repeatedly said in Fulfulde “*bilbil bone*” which means making *bilbil* is a hard work. But when you ask them why they do not do something else better than making *bilbil*; the answer was also short but maybe enough to understand the situation: “*There is nothing else to do. We don’t have farm here, it is our farm...Even wives of civil servants are now making beer, how can we survive without beer, we don’t have a choice*”<sup>25</sup> which I think has to do with their background as peasants who get cover most of their need from the farm. As I have seen my self everyday I went to the family, they are at home, at least one of them while one is going to

<sup>25</sup> - Mater’s speech from film *Le cabaret de la Mater*

visit other cabaret like Mater who use to walk sometime with her small box for selling cigarette, one stays at home. The same, they alternate the day for making beer, they have also plan for making food. Each wife has his day of cooking. This is briefly presented they daily occupation. From this presentation of daily occupation of Bava's household members, without trying to give a strict measure of their activity, we can sense that women seem to be the more dynamic in their acting. My next preoccupation is to try to see how much this daily struggle can be poured into their daily survival or needs. What they earn compared to the activity of their husband.

## CHAPTER 6: WOMEN'S CONTROL OF THEIR OWN EARNINGS

My concern in this chapter is to discuss how women control their separate incomes from beer brewing, in relation to the daily needs of the family or to their own needs. What is the position of Mafa women in the urban milieu compared to those who live in the rural milieu where the man is the main manager of the household?

### 6.1. Women task in the rural household and power relation

#### 6.1.1. Women contribution to the household

Traditionally the household consists of the father of the family, his wives and their children. This is the nucleus and basic unit of production of Mafa society. There is no strict distinction between the work of men and women concerning the organization of the activity in this structure. Both women and men work together, in the same farm. Farming is the most important activity for the survival of the family.

In addition to this common task, Sterner and David have tried to specify or describe some usual occupation of Mafa women in her society. They have noticed that: *“Besides producing and caring for children women grow their own crops on fields allotted to them by their male guardians, produce and care for children, care for small stock and poultry, and work in the family fields, assisting in the planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing of the all-important millet. They clean and keep house, fetching water, grinding grain and cooking it and all other foodstuffs...”* (Sterner and David, 1991:358) This description, from Sterner and David is an excerpt from their article where they try to link gender to cast study in Mafa society by comparing women's status to the blacksmith position: two elements of Mafa society who have less power compared to the rest of the members of this society.

Considering Mafa society as what Ann Oakley (1974) call traditional society or non-industrialized society, we can also say here in relation to the organization of work in the household that *“the location of work does not entail separation from family life, and the values relating to performance in the work role and the family role do not prescribe different and conflicting goals in each”*. Here the survival is based on what they get from their common labor. Generally, there is no clear distinction between the cash production and the food production for family. They used to convert the surplus of production into cash to buy some more cattle for the

corral. This small family rearing mostly plays the role of savings for the family. This saving can be used for any familial emergency, usual needs, sacrifice, bull festival (*maray*) ceremony, the dowry for the marriage of boys, for the education of children, health care etc...

Concerning the animal rearing, there is some slight nuance also. Male are more involved in cattle rising while women undertake breeding of poultry. This does not mean that cattle only belong to the men and poultry only to the women. It is generally said in Mafa society that: *“the father of the house can have thousand of fowls, the outsider should never know that it belong to men, the same, the wives can have thousand of goats, and the outsider should never know that it belong to the women”*. This creates a kind of opacity in terms of what really belongs to whom in the family. Everything seems to belong to the family and while belong to the family it is under control of the men. We can even say he is the owner, because in case of divorce for example, *“the woman runs away or is driven from the family compound, taking with her, in theory at least, only her babies and a few personal effects”* (Sterner and David, 1991:358). Then this could be the reason why the position of men is perceived not only as simple role but sometimes combined to power position or domination relation between men and women who can be nuanced according to the conception of Foucault view of power.

### **6.1.2. Power relation within rural household**

The father of the house supposed to be the “highest political authority” (Van Santen, 1998:404); naturally he is the overlord of the family wealth redistribution. It is him who decides what should be used for this or that. What women produce goes into the common production of the household and men is the one who assure the redistribution or who has control of it. This situation was emphasized in this study by the talk Bava gives about the important of his wife’s income in the family; he refers to this old system of income management by taking the example of his father. He said:

*“The present women’s behavior is different from the past, it is really different. “Today you ask your wife about his money she is not answer you, you ask her what she is doing with her income she is not talking or she just tells you that I didn’t sell well my bilbil, or I bought salt, vegetable... My father had 5 wives. Usually he asked his wives some money from their own activity to buy goat or beef for sacrifice or family meal. Then he will buy something for the all family according to the amount of money he got. In my case they are making bilbil everyday, but*

*they always say that they don't have money. I told them to stop brewing beer and join the village to do something else if this activity can help they don't listen. They keep saying or asking me with what are we going to buy salt?"*

But despite the fact that men seem to have control of the family revenue and relation within the household, it could be naïve to strictly attribute this relation to the domination or power relation. This can be just an accepted rule between man and woman in this society, because some women are so please to give this honor to their man not by respect to any tradition but just because they like to “appreciate the pride of their husband among the others outside”. Which means a man who can show to the rest of the society that their family is able to have certain amount of revenue enough for food and clothes, but also to participate to the festivities and rituals yearly organized within the society.

In other hand they still have also their way of “resistance”. As Abu-Lughod notice (1990) in his work referring to Foucault’s conception of power; “*where there is power, there is resistance... Power is something that works not just negatively, by denying, restricting, prohibiting, or repressing, but also positively, by producing forms of pleasure, systems of knowledge, goods, and discourses.*”(Abu-Lunghod, 1990:42) .Usually if the men are not able to have control of the activities and cannot plan well the needs for the family or to participate in what I have called yearly festivities, just by introducing their deception or complain into singing or gossiping, Mafa women is able to put some pressure on their husband to do think like they wish also.

### **6.1.3. Mafa women and her power’s field**

It is mentioned in everyday talk that, women in general have two principal fields where they can exert power on the men: the kitchen and the bedroom. Through these fields they can even influence the decisions which take usually place in the ‘public world by the men’.

Kitchen as fields of the female power can result by the refusal of the woman to make good food when she wants to express or impose an idea. This leads to Stoller and Olker (1986) idea about the discursive power of bad sauce for the Songhai of Niger which is also mentioned by Regis (2003) in her work among Fulbe people in Cameroon. It is a strategies by women which consist on making a bad cooking till the men get annoyed when there are clamming something (necessary for food, clothes, money etc), or they want to get an attention of men about

some strange behavior they don't like coming home too late, drinking to much, flirting other women...)

This symbolic meaning of kitchen as a field of power for women is even well illustrated by this popular dictum from Mafa which said "*man should never beat her wife in the kitchen*". The idea behind this thought is that; in case the woman senses danger, she could run into kitchen. From there, she can insult or say whatever to the man she should feel secured. This power women have in the kitchen here is related to some superstition which argues that if women hit the men with the stick she uses to make food with, it is a huge bad luck for the men.

The bedroom philosophy refers to the fact that, before taking some decisions, some men ask for advice from their wives. This means even if the man makes a decision, it is sometimes done after consultation or last opinion of the woman usually called "*Advise of the pillow, advice of the night etc...*"

Thus if we consider such situation, we could not deny the idea of power to Mafa women even in what I have called classic household in rural area.

If this doesn't work they can easily leave their husbands, which refer to Martin (1970) opinion about Mafa women, who consider that the only power women have in Mafa society is to change husbands and that they are only free to choose '*la sauce à laquelle elles seront mangées, c'est le seul piment de leur existence*' (The sauce in which they will be eaten, it is the only hot pepper of their existence)<sup>26</sup>.

By taking this approach into the context in which this study was done we could see also that the power relation can have other forms according to the milieu. The involvement of Mafa women into cash sphere or into separate income in the urban milieu, through their activities of beer brewing has given them the possibility to earn money and contribute to the family or to care for themselves. This can be some of the issues which allow women to express their power or independence in relation to men. To illustrate this situation I will try to give some examples related to my experiences from the field work particularly in the case of Bava household.

## **6.2. Beer brewing women in the urban household**

The change of place of living from rural area to urban milieu usually entails also some change in the activity and organization of the families. The expectation in the household from

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<sup>26</sup> - Reference from Van Santen (1996)



both parts (man and woman) as described above can be respected. What she can give or she is giving to the household is his will. These following paragraphs try to show in the case of Mater and Rachel (my main informants) what they earn approximately from beer brewing and how is it used or planned for daily needs.

### ***6.2.1. Ideas about Mater's and Rachel's beer income***

I have tried many times to get clearly what these women are gaining from what they call *their hard job* of making *bilbil*. My aim was not to make an economic understanding but just to have an idea about their contribution to this new form family in the merge of the city. I could not ask them to tell me directly their salary I feel myself going too much to their private life and personal economy. I choose to generalize my preoccupation by initiating question like how much does the activity of brewing beer is helping them or how the activity is helpful for them.

Mater's answer to this preoccupation can be summarized in this chat between one of my friends called Pascal and her. Rachel her co- wife didn't take too much part in this conversation, but she joins the group by the end of Mater speech. This how the conversation was going on:

*Mater: Elsewhere man can provide wood for cooking meal, he can provide sauces and millet for food, money for mill everything...but men and women are not the same everywhere. For us, it is also different. From this activity as you can see we can have something but not too much: 500fr, 200fr just to buy salt and vegetable for sauce.*

*Pascal: Only 500fr !*

*Mater: This is what you gain, your benefice. But if you add what you spend: you have to buy normally millet for 4000fr, wood for 2000fr, the crushing cost 200fr. Then all is 6200fr. Often if you don't sell well you can have 7000frs, then your benefice is 1000fr, which is not bad. Often if you are lucky or peoples have got their money (salary) you can have 8000fr and your benefice is 2000fr but without including your pain.*

*Pascal: Somehow you can have about 10 000fr.*

*Mater: It is hard to know. Any amount is possible sometime you can have 5000fr, even less 4000fr then you have totally lost [the capital]. In this case, you have to buy millet only for 3500fr and use the rest of 500fr to some vegetable for sauce. Your children are going to school, clothes and shoes for your self... you have to care for your self. If you just stay without doing something you will have nothing.*

*Not all women can save and keep money for them self, can do whatever with the money from beer activity like other are doing. Like us for example, our husband doesn't have enough money (salary) to care for all needs in the family, you have to buy most of thing your self; Clothes, sauces...everything. It is not possible to save money, it is not.*

*"If you do nothing you will have nothing, you do it with a lot of pain. It give you back aches, aches in all your body. You spend the same money for medicine, for your children who are going to school. But people always say that we have husband, what we are doing with their money. No, we are doing a lot with.*

*Some women are saying that their husband is not giving something to them which is not true also. Nobody knows what is going on in each of our heart only god knows if we are lying or not.*

*Pascal: Yesterday some people say that they are surprised that women are not buying car with the money from beer brewing.*

*Mater: Aihaa! ... Some women can build their "Halal" (own house), for us we can't because we have a lot to do. I think it was good in Mokolo. There you are making bilbil, but you cultivate or farm everything [for food] your self. You have everything in the farm. Here in the service (job in the city) you have to buy everything. We don't earn too much with bilbil, it is painful job but it is okay, we should thanks god. With the bilbil, you can sometimes laugh, you can sometimes cry.<sup>27</sup>*

Through this conversation of Mater and my friends Pascal, we could get Mater's point of view about the brewing of beer which she consider to be painful job but she does not have any alternative, but to do it. This lack of choice can be related to their background that, usually these women from rural area don't have any skill or knowledge on something which could help them make their living easier than expecting everything from the husband. It can also be a reflection of the general lack of jobs opportunity in the milieu. In this sense beer brewing is an attempts made by women to acquire independent sources of income, but it should be considered also here as a clever self employment by rural women in the urban milieu.

Concerning what they really earn from this activity remains unclear from her speech, which is not strange for me because I realize that it is not only Mater but women or people in general, are not to open or about reveling what their really earn from their business. The

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<sup>27</sup> - Some part of this conversation is in the film *Le cabaret de la Mater*.

common word in business is also what it said by Mater here: “*you can sometimes laugh, you can sometimes cry*”.

But if I try to give my own estimation based on my observation and some ideas from she said we can at least have the following comparison of their income in the household that is from both man and women (Bava and his wives income).

### **6.2.2. Comparison of the incomes of men and women.**

As far as I know, in the case of Bava household, I can say that they have almost the same salary, because according to what the husband tells me he earn actually about 50 000 Fr.

From the dialogue with Mater (and her co wife), we do not grasp enough idea about their real income. Their conclusion is that “*With the bilbil, you can sometimes laugh, you can sometimes cry.*” This means that sometime they can gain and some time they lost. But what is the average of their income? To have an idea about this, I have tried to determine their incomes by taking in consideration what is spent or the capital of business for one brewing, and the quantity of finished beer for sell. Then I could evaluate the price per liters.

According to what Mater said above, they spend about 6200fr for one brewery. They usually spend 4000fr for millet, 2000fr for wood and 200fr for mill. This is the cash they invest. After brewing they use to get about 200 liters of beer. If we just say that they sell one liter for 100Fr logically each wife could get  $200 \times 100\text{Fr} = 20\,000\text{Fr}$ . If we reduce 15liters for what they call *Leko* (free samples for tasting) they could have each 18500Fr per week. If we subtract the 6200fr of capital the benefice each week could be then 12300Fr per month is  $12300\text{fr} \times 4 = 49200\text{Fr}$ .

This is an estimation for each wife. If we combine what both Mater and Rachel are earning they have then about 100 000Fr a month.

This compare to the salary of the husband we can conclude that, they have almost the same income. The wives have even more because this is just a minimum evaluation of what they can get from this beer brewing. During my fieldwork time I never seen their beer left, it was always finish as they used to say “*at time*”. I didn’t get also a sign of complaint or lost after selling of beer. This means that the beer is successfully sold.

That was the case of small family production of beer. As I already mention in chapter four, there is many type of cabaret which means the amount of income from beer will depend on

how big the physical structure of the cabaret is. Some women who have big production, which means big cabaret selling beer 7day/7days can earn in one week what other are earning in one month. This means also that some women are earning more than a man can earn from his single job which salary vary between 20000Fr and 50000Fr a month. Then we can conclude here that generally in the case of these migrants living in the periphery of city from daily search of employments or having a temporary job with unimportant wages, the woman gains definitely more from beer brewing than what men are earning from their job. Then the question should be here to know how this income from beer as a separate income contributes to the daily life in the family.

### ***6.2.3. Beer brewer, money and power relation in the household***

I have shown that in the case of rural household, how the relation of gender or power relation is negotiated between men and women around the common production. Here because of the hardness of satisfying the needs in the household most of men should let their wife do some extra business to complete the cost of life in the household, but he (the husband) has no control of the income of his wife. The income in this context is considered as something from a self initiative or employment. The woman controls her income from beer as she wishes for the daily needs and for her own saving. This situation procures them some ability to make some decisions which are before supposed to be controlled by the husband.

The autonomy or independence which these women acquire from this income of beer can be presented in several ways. It starts with the negation of the simple courtesies or daily respect whose men usually benefit from their wife to the separation. I am not assigning entirely the family problems to the economic mobility of the woman, I want just to report here some case which contribute to reduce the 'authority of the men' in consequence it grants some power to women. There is some small rule which women should normally respect like asking for permission before going somewhere, asking the opinion of the husband before giving something even belonging to her to someone.

If we take a simple case of Mater and Rachel as Mafa women; they should ask their husband for permission before going to visit their relatives or friends living for example in Mokolo. They could ask also for some support for this circumstance from the husband, but his salary is not enough to assure all the needs or usual obligations. He should give priority to some

most important family needs. As he used to say: *“he can’t help them for what they can do themselves with the money they earn from beer”*. But as long as they have also their own means from separate income they don’t care much about authorization to go out or to travel away: As they also said:

*“Even with good husband you should be lucky to get pocket money for your travels. In our case, we go with no support from our husband, we leave our home no better than if we left the bush. You go like a dog; you come back like a dog. It’s like you are not living with him”* (see film *Le Cabaret de la Mater*).

This is how I think women and men negotiate this power relation in this context of living in the merge of the city. The concept of negotiation should be understood here from Gerson and Peiss approach in gender studies who said: *“The reciprocal processes of negotiation and domination elucidate the ways in which women and men act to support and challenge the existing system of gender relations. Domination describes the systems of male control and coercion, while negotiation addresses the processes by which men and women bargain for privileges and resources. Each group has some assets which enable it to cooperate with or resist existing social arrangements, although clearly these resources and the consequent power are unequal.”* (Gerson and Peiss, 1985:318)

The separate income gives some economic autonomy to the women in this particular society. This economic mobility of women can also lead them to an independent life, in others words to the statute of so called *“femmes libre”* (free women). This can happen when the balance of negotiation failed between men and women in the household. I mean by balance of negotiation here, the acceptance or tolerance women or men can accord to each other when the boundary of gender relation is crossed by one member. The boundaries are crossed when the women begin to do something which is supposed to be a men obligations or capacity and reciprocally. To following excerpt from my diary give us some clear Idea where to negotiation failed.

Martine is coming from the same village as Mater, Rachel and many others. Her story in Maroua is the same with Bava family. Martine’s husband was working in Maroua as a security guard almost the same job as Bava. This is how one of my friends has counted their story to me:

*“After some year spent in Maroua, the man went back to village to get married with Martine. After marriage they went back together to Maroua. The husband was doing well with her job, the woman begin to make beer for sell. They got three children. They were leaving quiet well since the husband gets sick, really sick. They went back to the village to get treatment from traditional medicine. They spend almost one year in their village before coming back to Maroua. The recovering time was too long. The husband lost his job he can’t anymore work. He has tried to look for another job but he couldn’t get. His wife was continuing to make bilbil to have food, to rent to house. After about one year the husband realizes that he can’t anymore stay in Maroua without doing anything. He suggested to his wife to return back to the village where he could himself, cultivate land and his wife from his part could continue with her activity of bilbil. The wife refused the proposition. The husband did everything to get his wife back to the village, but he couldn’t convince her. The man went back to the village alone, he begun to grow land, and he married a new wife. Unfortunately he get sick again and he dead 2 year later after his return back home. His first wife Martine is continuing making her bilbil in Maroua. Her cabaret is among the biggest cabaret in Maroua actually”.*

I was curious to know more about her myself. My aim was not to know how she gets rid of her husband but I wanted to know about how much successful is her beer brewing compared to Mater and Rachel production. The time I went to her cabaret, there were three women and two girls working at her place. I asked her if they were renting the cabaret place together with those women. She told me that she paid already more than half of money to own the place she is renting to live and make beer. Then the other women were renting the place from her. The three women are working for them self, the girls were helping her and some time they get an offer of one day to make their own beer. From my observation of how she is organized and the daily quantity of beer she produces was more than Mater and her co-wife do. For example in Mater place they used only three jars, but in her place she had six jars to boil beer. It is two times Mater’s production.

In this situation it is usually easy to blame women like Martine, as it has been reported to me this story as this friend talked to me: *“don’t you see how women are behaving after money, where is the love?”*. The idea behind this is that, Martine didn’t behave well because she refused to follow her husband back to the village, she did prefer to love money than her husband. But

we could reverse the understanding of the situation because this doesn't mean that Martine refuses to live with him or to take some responsibility for food or housing. Her husband could stay and help her wife but he didn't. My explanation of this situation is that, their separation was not really about money or love but it could be rather understood in terms of inversion of roles within the household. The man didn't accept this situation of being surviving from her wife incomes which socially could be perceived as a subordinated person to woman. Then the negotiations fail because the man didn't accept to survive only from his wife income, which could strongly reduce her authority or power, the wife didn't accept also to go back to the village because she knows she can earn a lot for her own which give her power also.

My conclusion here joins Tripp (1989) study of the case of women in Tanzania which argue: *"It seems clear that necessity has forced a number of women into earning money themselves in a way that has profoundly challenged men's traditional views about the advantages of them playing a less conspicuous economic role in the household. More importantly, it changed women's own view about the nature of their contribution to both the family and society in general"* (Tripp 1989:613). In relation to the ideal housewife, whose role is confined to purely housework, these women trying to acquire independent sources of income, at the same time can acquire also their independence or new perception within this society. The perception can be developed by the rest of the society or by them self. The following chapter tries to give some idea about the general perception or identity of beer brewers in the Mafa society as well as it could be the case in other parts of Northern Cameroon.





## **CHAPTER7: BEER BREWERS IDENTITY**

In addressing the issue of Mafa migration to city, specifically of women, Van Santen (1998:407) opines that: *“For the Mafa, urbanization has often coincided with islamisation. In consequence, moving to town means a profound change of identity”*. She focuses on Mafa women’s conversion to Islam religion and their new identity which are usually characterized by the change of name, language, praying habits, marriage rituals, economic occupation etc... compared to non-Islamized ones. In relation to this topic of Mafa women identity in the city, one could ask also about those who have moved to the city without any purpose of islamisation, what is their identity? I am not aiming to give a detailed study for all the case of Mafa women migration here, but to discuss this concept of identity related to gender relation, my example will refer to the case of beer brewer I am dealing with.

### **7.1. Beer brewer’s self perception**

When I talk of self of beer brewer’s self-perception then, I mean the way these women make sense of the barriers and challenges they face in a ‘male dominated’ culture and how they seek to reach positive outcomes for themselves. The perception of themselves is enhanced by their ability to do or to have what they could not get without making beer.

My understanding of beer brewer’s identity tries to refer to Mead’s approach, in which identity is not a static image; it is constructed through the view of the projection of the self to others. *“The self is something which has development; it is not initially there, as a birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process”* (Mead 1934, :135) .

If I take the example of my main informant, Mater and her co-wife, they perceive themselves as normal housewives but still proud of their activity. They had repeatedly asserted that: *“if we are not making beer we could not clothe our self, we could not buy salt, our children could not go to school etc...”* All these listings are in general male responsibility or roles, particularly in this context of life in the urban milieu where the standard of living depends usually on the men’s income. Their contribution to the household, or to take care of themselves means that they have taken charge of responsibilities which otherwise would have been reserves

of men. This confirms in other words their economic autonomy but it senses also their less subordination to the men. Their small income has given them a possibility to not expect everything from their husband and has changed their roles within the household. In this case, we can say that they perceive themselves as autonomous people, or even as men if we define man in terms of the role he is supposed to play in the context of household management.

Even they do not assume the position of men by virtue of the fact that they play roles which are socially reserved for men only, it could be seen that, considering what they do for the family or for themselves that women's identity in this position can be also viewed from Goffman's concept of "front stage" and "back stage". In this case, front stage can mean the perception of women in their normal setting, that is, as a housewife, and back stage can refer to women's perception when she is playing some male's role, for example the current change where Mafa women can also contribute to financial needs of the household.

The following story of one woman dealing with the same activity as Mater could help to understand the change of self perception by Mafa women also. Her name is Ngriya.

Ngriya is 52 years old. She is single woman living in Maroua for long time. She has divorced her husband who lives in Mokolo their hometown. She has four children, two boys and two girls. But one of her daughters is married. Ngriya is living with her children and one small child belonging to her elder boy in his own house; she built it five years ago. The living of Ngriya and her children is mostly based on making *bilbil* and accidentally *Arki* (strong liquor distilled from millet beer). One day I went to her place and she was making *Arki*. I was curious about the installation she was making for distillation of this type of beer rather than why she is making *Arki*. My question was then to know how she was doing this, and she told me:

*It is just a struggle for life; I can't sell anymore my beer that is why I am making Arki People did something to my house, my house is bewitched. If I couldn't sell well my beer like now, I could not buy land like this. In the past, when you came to my cabaret there is no place to sit, it was always crowded.*

*"Dounias" (people) say that I am becoming rich and they have "spoiled" (bewitched) my house. People are saying why a simple woman like me should have what they don't have...Some are complaining in the quarter that my child has shop, me, the mother is still buying more and more land here in Maroua, I still have houses. People are against that, for this reason they*

*spoiled my house. If it were that bad to sell beer, I would not have been able to own my own house, or I would have been expelled out of any house I were renting.*

This excerpt shows how brewing *bilbil* helped her to have her “own house” and people are jealous of her. Being a victim of men jealousy let us confirm a social success of women in accordance to the way Ngriya perceive herself. This situation introduces us to see the general perception people have of beer brewers.

## **7.2. Beer brewer’s perception by others**

To clarify this idea about the identity of these women, I will better try first to relate the discussion to the general debate about rural women migration to urban milieu where their relations to this milieu seem controversial.

If we consider first a perception from their people back home, beer brewers from the city are envied by their fellow women but source of trouble for certain men in the village. My explanation to that situation is from general comment people have of them. My explanation to that situation is from general comment people have of them. General Mafa comment is that: When they go to the village, they usually look nice. They have nice and expensive wrappers and shoes. They are mirroring good life of the city. Women who just stay in the village, which individual income is not enough to provide for her such ‘elegance’ feel the desire to be at their place or to have what wear. The first thing they do is to ask if it is possible to go to have some weeks of selling beer then they could also earn some money to buy some more clothes attain other needs. In case the urban woman agrees, the problem is to convince the husband. But usually it is rare for men to permit their wives to go and do such part time jobs. Because they believe that nobody will control their wives, then they can be “gifts” for people in the town. In this case, they should satisfy their wives buy giving them what they need; for instance new clothes for feast. Society would generally frown upon men who permit their wives to move out in search for jobs in the urban areas.

It is clear here that these women should have better conditions of life compared to those who are in the village, but people still feel not confident about their source of success or their life style in general in the urban milieu.

Usually people migrate to the urban milieu with the hope of getting a better condition of life, or to improve their economic condition, but the towns are also regarded as a necessary evil

for, while they provide wage employment, they were also morally corrupting. This explains maybe, partially some conservative's opinion Obbo (1990) is also referring to that, it is usually argued that in some African cultures that, the way to urban milieu should not be for women. The populace prejudice in many African societies is that the good woman stays at home in the village because, if she is in town, she is source of worry for her husband. She is a source of worry because people usually think that the men will lose control of his wife; that their women can get easily get involved in prostitution, the town makes women lazy and consequently makes it hard for such women to carry out their responsibilities as housewives (Obbo, 1980:9).

This is how generally people perceive the relation rural women can have with urban milieu. But as I underlined this perception can be just a purely conservative ideology of certain categories of men because now, people move to town rarely leaving their wives in the village if they have reliable job in the city. Some women from broken marriage, unmarried women or young girl are more and more taking their own initiatives to migrate to city; sometimes, they can offer an extra support for their relatives back home.

If we refer to the beer brewers only, there is no a specific "stigma" or definition of them apart from being a beer brewers. The idea people have of them depends on each beer brewer's personality and her reputation, it depends also on type of cabaret (simple place to drink, a dancing place, a night club ...) she deals with. That is the attitude of society towards a beer brewer may to a large extent, depend on how she conducts herself rather than the fact that she brews beer.

If we refer to their status, we can distinguish two main types of beer brewer, a married woman living with her husband and an independent woman or single woman. Generally people have more respect for the category of women who make beer in the family house. She is perceived as a simple household but involved in some economic activity which can contribute to the family survival. How the income is managed, and who does what for the household remains the family's decision. The case of my main informants, Mater and Rachel is one example.

Concerning the case of single women or independent women, there are many types of women. Those who have never married, divorced women, and widowed women. For these categories of the women, people always wonder about the real nature of their economic success. They always wonder if it is only the beer which they sell but the question remains without clear

answers, because all that one can see in an objective way it is the beer, the remainder depends on the way in which this kind of woman manages really her private life. Indeed there are women in this situation which are just doing their beer business but some of them can do both (beer brewing and prostitution). Other plays the role of "*Deuxieme bureau*" (Second office)<sup>28</sup> for some men. On the other hand, some of these women have a gigolo, while other categories are still waiting for the "right man" (the man who fit to their love). This means that it is hard to present the clear identity of these women brewing beer particularly those who are single or independent.

The general view is that people are well aware of their independence in comparison to those who are living with their husband. If they are not widow which means that they could be inheriting their house from the dead husband, they are renting their house, but in most case they are owner of the place where they live and do their business which confirms their autonomy and independence. If they are widows in which case they usually would inherit their house from the dead husband, they usually rent their houses, but in most cases they are owners of the places where they live and do their business which confirms their autonomy and independence. By virtue of the fact that in some African societies such as Cameroon expects the woman to be with a husband at a point in life, women who stay alone usually lack respect within the society despite the fact that they are autonomous.

For those who have children, it recognized also that many children have access to school because of their mother beer brewing; others also promote self employment for their kids by buying them motor bikes to do a taxi. Some of them are building small shop for their sons like in the case on Ngriya. This is also how they defend their "alcoholic activity" again certain tendencies which consist to banish the beer activity.

If we come to the types of cabaret, those which are more animated like *Kambuch*, *Bakassi* and working day and night like as "real cabaret" or Night Club are systematically undeniable categorized as a center of prostitution, and delinquency by the rest of the society. Consequently the owner itself is indexed.

Though I have tried to give a general view of the beer brewer within the Mafa society; there seems to be no objective view of the activity of beer brewing as a general identity.

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<sup>28</sup> - Name given to women where some men spend their time and money, but back home they try to convince their wife that they were too busy in the office.

However, the perception that seems to run across them in the society is that, they are women who by virtue of the fact that they are economically self reliant are able to make separate income from their husbands. As a result of their economic self reliance, they are able to take up some financial responsibilities which would have been on the men .The common picture have of them is that there are now able to challenge men in terms of income or family revenue trough their self employment or separate income.

## CONCLUSION

The main focus in this study was to know how women's beer brewing activity can be both a part of and also contribute to the ongoing changes in gender relation in Northern Cameroon. To discuss this issue, I took the case of Mafa women who are involved in this activity of brewing millet beer to earn money.

Mafa has been presented in this work as a group of people mainly living in Mokolo. Because of their environment is unfavorable to the satisfaction of their daily needs, the majority of this population has defined a strategy of life which consists of maintaining a strong relation between rural and urban life through migration. Though this migration was first associated with men, there is a new trend where women are actively participating in it as well. Women could either migrate alone, or follow their husbands. In this sense, these people in general have used migration here as a part of life, that is, as a strategy for survival. This situation explains their presence in the merge of city such as Ouro Tchede in Maroua where I carried out my field work.

I have tried to give some ideas about their activities in this kind of milieu compared to what they used to do in the rural areas which is farming. I attempted to explain that, in general men are involved in the small jobs in the city, while women have initiated a self-employment which is brewing of millet beer; an activity which before was specially practiced in rural environment for ritual and ceremonial purpose but also to earn money. For some reasons, we have considered the brewing of beer as controversial activity in this region. Because for some opinions, we called coalition against *bilbil*, the production of beer is more seen as a danger for the society because it affects food supply, it increase the problem of alcoholism, it has also some critic related to the religious view just to mention a few of the problems people associate with beer brewing. But despite all these opposition to the activity of beer brewing, women has succeeded in maintaining the rhythm of production even introduced it as a formal economy in a way that they have to pay tax and it is now considered to be among the most successful activities in this milieu.

To understand this innovative aspects of how women has initiated and challenge the various opinions which are opposed to the proliferation of beer activity, I have considered women as entrepreneur which according to Barth(1972:5) "*is someone an entrepreneur is someone who takes the initiative in administrating resources, and pursues an expansive*

*economic policy. These characteristics imply that the entrepreneur must initiate and coordinate a number of inter-personal relationships in a supervisory capacity to effectuate his enterprise”*

Barth underlines also that *“The goods which are obtained through entrepreneurial activity are clearly not restricted to purely monetary or even material forms, but may take the form of power, rank or experience and skill; indeed one or more of these forms may be the explicit goal of an entrepreneur”*(*op.cit, p.8*). This assumption of Barth theory let us confirm that, through the commerce of millet beer, Mafa women as many others women belonging to this area have find the way to earn their own income. I found that this separate income from beer brewing contributes to economic autonomy or social mobility of these women. We have explain that autonomy mean here the ability of beer brewers to do what they couldn't do without this separate income from beer brewing, such as providing food for the family, clothes and schooling for children, to take care of them self. Compared to the rural household where the family income is produce in common and in general is control by head of the family: the husband.

The ability to do as they please with their earnings from beer brewing can be presented here as reflection of their independence, which usually can affect the general consideration of domination or power men have on their women.

I have tried also to relate my understanding of concept of power relation to Foucault approach which considers that *“power does not ‘function in the form of a chain’ – it circulates. It is never monopolized by one centre. It is deployed and exercised through a net-like organization’. This suggests that we are all, to some degree, caught up in its circulation”* Hall (1997:50). In this sense, I argue that even in the rural or traditional household we can totally deny power to women. They still have their ways of resistance through some pacific reaction have related to the concept of *“bad sauce”* and what we called also advises of the night.

Concerning the beer brewers, we found also that their ability is based not only on buying food and clothes, but there is a tendency of buying a plot of land, or even own a house. We conclude that this contributes to confirm women power by gaining their total independence. This authenticates also the general change of gender relation and family structure in this part of Cameroon.



The change in household can be perceived in a way that we can see more than before the number of single women called "*femme libre*" mostly playing a role of "*deuxiem bureau*" (Second office).

My general understanding of this work is that beer brewing can be considered as one of the activities which have contributed to bring Mafa women "out of the kitchen" or domestic world to the public sphere, from rural milieu to urban milieu, from their situation of dependence to almost complete independence. It has impacted positively on the economic lives of the women and has changed the old structures of the Mafa household. Here I mean complete independence, by view of the fact that some of the women who are in this activity are able to own their houses which are theirs alone as in the case of Ngriya or Martine. This could from my point of view explain the fact that most women involved in this activity are single, widow, and divorced. This made me conclude then that, the economic position of Mafa women can conduct to the deformation of traditional structures of family which constitutes of man, wife/wives and children.

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