



Between Hammers and Papers

**Day to day struggles of a blacksmith entrepreneur
from the iron market in Maroua, Far North Cameroon.**



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ABSTRACT

At the blacksmith market in Maroua, in the Far North region of Cameroon, the hammers clang all day long. Here, the local blacksmiths turn scrap iron into objects of everyday use. Car bodies become wheelbarrows, truck wheels are transformed into ploughs and smaller scrap iron parts end as spoons. The practices of blacksmiths are representative of many other places in Africa where recycling became a way to earn living and where many craftsmen form a part of large untaxed informal sector.

Abakar, a young creative blacksmith running his workshop at the market wants to escape the viscous circle of tapping the hammer from dusk till dawn. He wants to modernize his workshop and create the first blacksmith enterprise in Far North Cameroon. Lacking capital in form of scholarly education, the abilities to write and read with ease, knowledge of computers and connection to people in power he encounter problems each time he leaves the market and enters bureaucratic arena.

This thesis is an attempt to link the life-story and the day to day struggles of Abakar to the inequalities of chances and show the globalization from the bottom of African society, as experienced by someone who does not belong to the elite but wants nonetheless to make it.

The paper is accompanied by a film of 52 minutes with the title “Noise That Brings Money” which presents many of the scenes which are described and analysed in this thesis.

Keywords: Africa, Cameroon, entrepreneurship, modernity, globalization, technology.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Klanggg....

Klangg.....

klang...

Abakar was hitting the hammer on an anvil. He was wearing a white and red Adidas T-shirt with the imprinted words “*Impossible is nothing*”. He did not know what that meant, though. He never learned English. Sitting opposite him with the video camera, I thought that maybe it doesn’t matter since he was truly living this statement. Abakar was a dreamer. And like many dreamers around the world he believed in things that many others considered impossible. The 6 kg hammer in his hand cut through the air and smashed against the car body of the car standing next to us.

Klang

Klang

Klang

He has has been making the next exemplar of his recent invention – the “improved electric cooker on wood and charcoal” Abakar has been exposing it at various exhibitions and planned to apply for a patent to get the exclusive right to its marketing. He was dreaming of being able to produce such cookers in big quantities with less effort, of buying machines and of modernizing his workshop, of hiring people and establishing the first legal blacksmith enterprise in Far North Cameroon. Abakar was dreaming of being successful, like so many other people around the globe. *It’s my goal*, he would tell me over and over again. *I will show that blacksmithing is not some low-level profession.*

Klang

Klang

Klang

It clangs great!! Hehe

It's noise that brings money

If there is no noise there is no money!

Noise make all blacksmiths happy. “Hehe hehe

Klang klang klang

There was much noise but not so much success at the iron market. Blacksmiths – once the only people possessing the knowledge of smelting iron, once the only people who could provide the society with tools and weapons - had lost their special status. With the growing import of European iron to Cameroon, the local techniques of iron smelting has gradually lost their importance and finally ceased to exist. Nowadays blacksmiths in Maroua, as well as in many other places around Africa, are reusing scrap iron to meet the demands of local population. Recycling became the way to survive.

Strolling through the blacksmith market one could find many of the international brands advertised on TV channels and posters all over the world: there were pieces of Peugeot cars and parts of Yamaha motorbikes, there were covers of Samsung computers and LG DVD players. Things made in France and things made in China. No one who acquired this items for the first time would possibly imagine that after serving in households and on the roads all over the world they will end up on the market at the edge of the Sahel waiting to be transformed into knives, scissors, spoons, buckets, rakes, wheelbarrows, shoves, ploughs, stoves; waiting to be put back to life by blacksmiths and their children taking their first steps in learning the skills from their fathers.

Tracing the biographies of the objects scattered around the workshops says a lot about inequalities in the global world. Machine-made in tens of thousands of copies in factories all over the world cars, motorbikes, DVD players and TV's end up reused in places where machines and assembly lines have not yet fully replaced human hands and where recycling is not a consequence of "green politics" that favours protecting the environment but a must to survive. Blacksmiths were linked to the global world only through the leftover scrap iron. Their cars were not supposed to drive any more, their computers would not connect to the internet.

Blacksmith were trapped in technological and cultural confusion between what was before and what is to come. The shift from Cameroon's status as a French colony to an independent state, the growing importance of scholarly education, the increasing influence of the global market economy as well as the emergence of new tools, machines and digital electronic media changes the local life in Maroua and demands new kind of knowledge and new skills from people who wish to achieve a financial stability and social mobility.

And here was Abakar, who dropped out of school shortly after he started it, who wandered the streets of Maroua trying to sell whatever possible to support the family, who started from

scratch as a blacksmith. and who wanted to get out of the viscous circle of tapping the hammer and grant a better future for his children. Coming from underprivileged background with lack of fluent French, and abilities to read and write with ease and without connections to people in power he believed to make the entrepreneurial myth- *from zero to hero*- come true. His dream of establishing an enterprise, of entering the formal sector, could benefit Cameroon and Africa, a continent lacking strong middle class and in need of entrepreneurs and small private businesses.

But the world around, both in Maroua and in so called urban metropolis around the world does not favour people whose starting capital is low. The story of Abakar pursuing his dream of upward mobility addresses the issue of worldwide inequality of chances offering some insight of how and why this inequalities are reproduced both locally and globally and how they impact individuals. It offers an example of how the global is working today from the perspective of someone who does not belong to the elite but who nonetheless wants to make it!

2. MAROUA AND THE REMOTENESS OF CHANCES

To say that a region is remote is a relative statement. Remoteness depends on one's stand. Looked upon from Paris, London New York, places where global events are shaped, or even from Yaounde or Douala, places shaping the Cameroonian everyday life Maroua, is a rather remote place.¹

Situated at the edge of the Sahel, where savannah slowly gives way to the desert Maroua is the biggest city in the northernmost part of Cameroon, the Far North. The region has been home to pastoralist groups such as the Mbororo and Fulbe as well as to numerous ethnic groups that inhabit the Mandara mountain chain that spans approximately 200 km on the today's border to Nigeria.

Maroua is hot and dry. Temperatures often exceed 40 degrees celsius and everyone hopes for a two month long rainy season which comes around August. Industry in Far North is nearly non-existent and animal husbandry, especially cattle and agriculture based on cultivation of sorgho, millet, mais and peanuts are the main means of subsistence. (deLancey2010)²

Maroua the is culturally and ethnically heterogeneous urban area. The lingua franca of the region is Fulfulde, and the majority of population is Muslim. With a fast growing population which of 2010 was estimated at around 300.000 people Maroua is currently the forth largest urban area in Cameroon and the biggest in the northern part of the country. It is the administrative centre and important transport crossroad. The airport connects the city with the south of the country, thereby facilitating the influx of tourism and university established in 2008 attracts more young people from the region.

But a „place“ is not only a geographical but also a social category. (Ferguson 2006: 6) Maroua's place in the world hierarchy, and remoteness of chances is to a large extent result of the last 200 years of history which it shares with the nation state of Cameroon. Cameroon is a country in central Africa spanning over 1000 kilometres from the south to the north and covering three climatic zones with a population of around 19 million people from more than 200 ethnic groups³.

¹ I fact I met many Cameroonians after my fieldwork and never met anyone who has ever been to Maroua unless the person originating in the northern parts of Cameroon.

² If not stated differently all information come from the Dictionary of the Republic of Cameroon. (de Lancey et.all. 2010)

³ The exact number of ethnic groups in Cameroon differs depending on the source of information. Dictionary of the Republic of Cameroon. Provides the reader with various sources and numbers which oscilate around 200. (de Lancey et.all. 2010)



The territory of today's Cameroon became a German protectorate at the end of the 19th century, and was later occupied by British, French and Belgian troops during World War I, subsequently mandated to Great Britain and France by the League of Nations in 1922. The country gained independence from France in 1960. In October of 1961, after a plebiscite in British Cameroons, an area between newly established countries of Nigeria and Cameroon, the overwhelmingly Christian population of southern part of British Cameroons was affiliated to Cameroon. Since then Cameroon is a country with two official languages, French and English.(de Lancey 2010)

The post-colonial era brought about challenges for the newly established independent nation states on African continent. Cameroon, other African countries alike adapted the western modes of governing and the country was gradually driven into the global market economy. Since the 60's

millions of development money flew in to help Africa to catch up with the west. All this changes did not bring the average Cameroonian closer to the average citizen in other places in the world.

The democratization was only formal and elections had been often described as staged happenings. Since gaining of independence in 1960 Cameroon had only two presidents. The time of governance of the first president Ahmadou Ahidjo who held the office from 1960 to 1982 is often described as an authoritarian single-party rule. Resigning in 1982 Ahidjo gave the power to his prime minister Paul Biya who has been in office since 1982.

Politically and economically Cameroon has been dependent on other countries, most notably France, the United States and increasingly China. After the discovery of exploitable petroleum reserves in the late 1970's, petroleum became the basis of economy and the most valuable export. It is also a leading producer and exporter of aluminium and has significant deposits of natural gas, iron ore and bauxite as well as exploitable amounts of gold, diamonds, cobalt, granite, nickel, rutile, tine. The variety of natural resources increasingly attracts foreign companies which enter the country interested in extraction. (de Lancey 2010 p.246-247) ⁴

The richness under the ground does not materialize itself on the ground. In this respect Cameroon shares its fate with many other African nation states where the creation of an independent, bureaucratically run state privileged privatization and accumulation of capital by dominant classes who own the principal factors of production, notably land. (Bayart et.al 1999: 115) As the result the role of most African countries in the global economy, including Cameroon is described as the provider of natural resources for richer nations around the globe. (Ferguson 2006; Moyo 2010) Apart from natural resources there is little investment in small and medium size businesses. The poorest countries are not so much exploited as neglected by foreign investors. In fact statistics show that global capital does not flow to Africa, not to speak about places like Maroua. Africa is nearly invisible in the global economy. As of 2010 Africa as the continent attracted less than 1% of the global capital flow. The richest 20% of countries received 88% of the funding.. (Moyo 2010: 99; Ferguson 2006)

The phenomenon of corruption is commonly mentioned as one of the main reasons for the

⁴ The Australian company Sundance which entered Cameroon in 2006 has 90% of stake at Cam Iron. The company has a project at Mbalam, South Region, to mine ore to export at Kirbi. Cobalt deposits which are estimated to be the biggest in the world are in early stages of development. Nickel and manganese will be by-products of the enterprise owned by Geovic company. African company conducts test drillings for gold and artisanal gold production in eastern and northern Cameroon. Recently two Korean company C.K. Mining and Kocam has entered the country interested in gold, diamonds and silver whereas Canadian company Mega Uranium show its interest in the recently discovered uranium. (de Lancey 2010: 246-247)

continents underdevelopment and lack of interests from side of investment(Bayart 1993; 1999; Olivier de Sardan 1999, Moyo2010). While the formal norms and values of the public sector are copied from the European model, in practice there is a shallow line between the private and public and the local sociocultural logics privilege favours and practices which according to European model are simply corrupt.(Olivier de Sardan 1999: 46-47) In the latest index of Transparency International Cameroon was 144 out of 176 countries in terms of corruption. The past decade was even worse ⁵

The GDP (Gross domestic product) per capita is 1 150 USD Cameroon, 35 times less than its former colonial power France and 90 times less than one of the world leaders Norway.⁶ A publication of the World Bank from 2012 about the Cameroonian economy stated that 90 percent of the work force earn their living in the informal sector which is not taxed, unmonitored by government and not included in any gross national product.. The formal private sector and the public sector employ 4 percent and 6 percent of the workforce, respectively.

The phenomén of brain drain – emigration of large number of educated people - has been affecting the country negatively. According to a survey from 2007, 83% of youth planned to leave Cameroon and 80% of doctors already did so. Higher education has suffered in recent years due to the lack of adequate funding and loss of faculty members who moved off to other countries, especially South Africa and the United States in search of better working conditions. (de Lancey 2010: p.200-201)

As the result of few job opportunities the informal sector in Maroua is blooming. Using the proximity of Nigeria, many people in Maroua engage in informal trade of various articles that pass between the two countries. Motorbikes, buses and cars are filled with products from Nigeria and later sold on the roads and bazaars in Maroua. Such informal flow of goods ensures survival for a big part of the population. The most commonly brought product is petrol which is brought to Maroua on motorbikes and sold along the sides of the roads by young boys. The local attitude is best represented by the omnipresent expression: “On se débrouiller” meaning “we find the way to get along. (Waage 2006) The appropriation of scrap iron by the blacksmiths from Maroua is only one of many examples of debrouillage, of finding creative ways to cope with the difficult situation.

⁵ In 1998 and 1999 Cameroon was on the last place on the corruption Index by Transparency International.(one must however mention that also less countries have been taken under consideration.) In 2005 the Cameroonian police was declared the most corrupt institution in the world. (De Lancey 2010:116)

⁶ <http://data.worldbank.org/country/cameroon>
in comparision the GDP of France was estimated as 39 700USD and the GDP of Norway at 99 500USD.

3. THE FIRST ENCOUNTER

His cloths were a bit too big. He wore large brown trousers, a loose grey jumper and a Kufi cap – a traditional Muslim head wear in white and blue pattern. The cheap plastic sunglasses that read *Fashion* on the side of the frame, that he used to protect his eyes from sparkles while welding where his trade mark. Abakar looked cool, this much I remember from our first meeting. I didn't have time to pay attention to anything else, it all went so fast. We were just introduced to each other and moments after we shook our hands for the first time Abakar grabbed a bag laying on the nearby chair and here he was next to me, with a bundle of diplomas and photos stating his participation in numerous contests and expositions around Cameroon. Handing me one photo after another, he explained each very briefly trying to impress me with his past achievements.

Here I won, here I came second, here the third, here the second and here are all the photos, look this is with the governor, here with the minister, and this Voila!! this is the president of Cameroon, over there I won..”

It all goes wrong went through my head. If it would be a film about past achievements Abakar would definitely have won what must have looked like a small film casting. Being the midpoint of the attention of some young, white student coming from the country he had never heard about could definitely raise his reputation on the local arena. In spite of all the anthropological relevance that the recycling practices seemed to offer I was sceptical about starting to film at the market. I was afraid that with Abakar as the main protagonist I would end up doing something of a promotional video about turning cars into buckets. A rather poor perspective I thought.

Some 2 weeks earlier the stamp in my passport said Republique du Mali. I was prepared to leave for Bamako when a sudden coup d'état shook the Malian capital and destabilized the country for many months to come. The airport in Bamako was closed, Mali was no option. Maroua in the Far North of Cameroon was the only other place where I could profit from the university cooperation and thus was a natural emergency solution. Since I have never been to Sub-Saharan Africa before and did not speak any local languages Cameroon wasn't much more alien to me than Mali.

I flew to Paris, got the visa and after few days of accommodating to the heat of the Far North I collected all the necessary documents from the university of Maroua. My project, at least on paper was set for local art production with a goal of trading it to tourists.⁷ Writing my project

⁷ The topic similar to the one explored by Lucien Taylor and Ilisa Barbash in their film: *In and out of africa* (1992)

description I tried to be as vague as possible and rather than exploring a particular topic I wished to get as close to the people and to the experience of everyday life. I knew that Maroua is a city of cattle and thus of leather processing and that there is a lot of craftsmen in and around the city whose repetitive activities might give me chance to film long hours and thus construct some kind of universal story about people's life.

At the University I was introduced to Saini, a local shoemaker who knew plenty of craftsmen in Maroua. Saini agreed to give me a tour through the city and try to help me find a suitable protagonist for the project. We visited one workshop after the other where people processed skins, fabricated wallets, bags, shoes and the more I saw the more I was concerned. What was interesting on paper would not work as a film. People scattered all day long in tiny dark chambers hiding from the strong Sahelian sun; the smell of leather; and the multitude of flies. No thank you. Leather processing wasn't a good idea.

Strolling through the city in confusion I slowly began to realize that the project description I wrote in a dark and snow-covered northern Norway would not be of much use. Unexpected details like light conditions or the simple fact that people did not really seem to be interested in being filmed crashed the abstract theoretical ideas underlying the project in a few moments. Out there, on the noisy street in Maroua I thought about the different ways of preparing and making films. On one hand films based on well researched topic, prepared shooting dates and locations, which thanks to a clear outline of a final-product can get an easier funding. On the other films full of open – options which start with the goal of getting to know other people and their life-words through the process of filming. I was doing the latter form of film and started to lose my confidence. Standing on the noisy street in Maroua I had no clue any more. My pessimism was reaching its peak. *There is still one place that you have to visit. I will take you to the blacksmiths. I talked to one blacksmiths who is waiting to meet you. You should see the place before you decide about anything.* Saini really had it all planned out. What would I do alone? I don't know.

We took the moto taxi from the city, crossed the busy central market and few minutes later arrived at the foothill of the redish mountain, comonly known as Koselbei. The drone of motorbikes gave way to the repetitive clang of hammers. Heaps of scrap iron laying around the workshops, transformed into knives, ploughs and wheelbarrows triggered my attention. *Globalization, creolization, appropriation, bricolage* and other concepts that were familiar to me from books that I had read and classes that I had attended as a student of anthropology popped up in my head as I saw

the ingenious transformation of scrap iron. And this is how I was introduced to Abakar, greeted by his genuine smile and covered by photos, diplomas and many details about his achievements. *Here I won, here I came second, here the third....* I stood there thinking that it could be great. Appropriation of cars, clangs of hammers, children running around the market. Everything but not a promotional video.. *Voila!! this is the president of Cameroon, over there I won..*”

A few days have passed since our first encounter until I realized that much of what I was looking for was there. First of all Abakar's genuine smile and eagerness to be on film was already half of the success in finding a character. Additionally he was working among other people constantly engaged in some sort of social situations. Last but not least transforming cars into cookers was not only audio-visually interesting but also of anthropological importance. It said something about the local and the global. Considering the accessibility problems often encountered in similar visual projects and the fact that I came to Maroua completely unexpected, I realized that Abakar's interest in being filmed was a golden opportunity that I should take. Maybe he was pushy and seemed to hope for some advantage from the project, but didn't I need him as well in the first place?

Two days later, all my doubts left behind, and with hope that Abakar had not changed his mind in the meantime I returned to the market to announce with all my confidence that I really wanted to make a film with him. Abakar agreed straight away.

-Oh that's great! That's great! No problem! Sure You can! Now it's a very good time to film because I am preparing for an exhibition in Abuja..

-What ? I asked astonished by the information which would probably have spared me all the doubts I went through had I received it during our first meeting.

-Well, there is an exhibition in Abuja in Nigeria and I was selected to go over there, he said You can go with me and film it if you want. We just have to speak to the officials to as if you can go with me... That is something, I thought. My mood changed straight away. There is a story to construct the narrative around and maybe I will go to Nigeria. Nothing better than a trip or a ritual in terms of having a safe and smooth structure for the film, with a beginning and an end, went through my head.⁸ Additionally having to meet officials offered a chance to get into other arenas than just the blacksmith market. I could see the relation between the unprivileged craftsmen and the privileged officials, to study up a bit. (Nader 1972) I already started to construct abstract narratives

⁸ Paul Henley points to the fact that many early ethnographic films documented rituals thus remaining true to the chronology of events. (Henley 2006: 376)

of the film that I had not yet started to make. To my greater surprise Abakar invited me to his household

A few hours later - Abakar behind the gear of his old Yamaha and me on the back we made our way up the narrow, stony paths of his neighbourhood. Nasara Nasara⁹ – went the crowd of screaming children. It was a classic arrival scene. All curious eyes focused on me as I found myself in the spacious yard surrounded by several muddy households. Each of them as I learned a few minutes later, was occupied by one of Abakar's brothers who lived there with their wives and children. The remaining households belonged to Abakar's mother and his father's sister. A big 3 generational household.

Abakar's room was modest. The 10 square meter space was covered by a bed and a large cupboard filled with Nigerian pots, a common marriage gift in northern Cameroon. There was a table with a radio and a few photos of family members hanging on the wall. Catching my attention bigger than all the other photos, was the one depicting the president of Cameroon Paul Biya, and his wife Chantal approaching Abakar's stand at the exhibition of agricultural tools in southern Cameroon. The event was so important to Abakar that he had the same photo hang twice on the opposite walls of the room.

We sat on the floor and spoke about the weeks to come as his wife Sureya , prepared the mais - couscous in the kitchen across their room. Abakar started to show me the photos from various trips and exhibitions that he made since he became a blacksmith and I started to learn the first details.

“Look, everything I earned is thanks to this profession. Recognition, status, everything you see in this household is thanks to blacksmithing. All thanks to God and to my own initiative. And when I take the photo with President Biya it's not a joke! And when I take my diplomas, it's not a joke! I am with the officials, with the prefect, with the governor, with the minister, I am with the president Biya. It's not a joke!

Blacksmithing changed this entire household. Before the household wasn't like this. It's me who brought the light and even the paint to this house. When I was born it was nothing. Zero. It's all with the money from this profession. So this profession is good for the family!

⁹ „Nasara“ meas a white person in Fulfulde.

Blacksmithing became the bread and butter of the three generational household. Three out of four of his brothers learned blacksmithing from Abakar and two of them have small independent workshops at the iron market. The youngest brother Nasir still works at his workshop. Abakar gradually taught him all the skills he himself had acquired throughout the years. His son Adamou and adopted son Moumini also came to the workshop during weekends and holidays.

You see, here in this neighborhood most children are orphans. They grow up without a father. This is why now when my children do not have school I make sure they come to the workshop and I teach them that the first thing is a profession.

Abakar wore a T-shirt which read GIC ADAAM: Association des Amis et d'Artisanat de Maroua. Pointing to the logo he continued:

It is an association that I created and it is thanks to this association, that the state paid for our trips and I had a chance to travel for the first time. I went all over southern Cameroon. I was to Yaounde, to Bamenda, to Ebolowa. I participated in seminars, gathered information. Came up with new ideas to invent and innovate. I said to myself: "I have to get down to work" .I want to establish an enterprise. Because you see, there has never been any blacksmiths who would pay taxes. Who would be formally registered. You won't find a single one. And I want to do it.

When I establish the enterprise I will leave it to my family and I will leave this city, leave this country and go abroad to learn Qo'ran! To become Sheikh! Later when I come back and I see that everything works I will continue, but not like now. I can continue but not like now. Maybe I will send my children to the universities. So that they could do better than me. So that they can improve. Even when I die I will leave a testament so that my company would not die.

Koran was the cornerstone of Abakar's life, the guideline for his actions. He trusted in the almighty God, accepting with humility whatever constraints life brought to him. He believed that everything happens on purpose including the fact that I did not go to Mali, but was brought to his workshop instead. As unprivileged as he was to achieve the success he was thus confident and patient about outcome of his projects.

Inch Allah With Gods help the enterprise I say that will work out will work out! I will prove that you can have people who went to school and come back to the market to work as blacksmiths. Me Abakar I can do this. I can do this!

Thanks to his persistence, his ethic of saving money and investing it in his workshop Abakar seemed predisposed to run his own business. He did not furnish the apartment, did not have a TV and drove a worse motor than his younger brother whose income was a lot smaller. He was at the same time critical of people spending money on things that do not bring them any further:

I do not want to show off with everything I earn, with my salon, by hanging out with a new motor and so on. I could do it if I wanted but not now Instead .I want to save what I earn and invest it. I do it step by step. I want to exceed the association and crate the enterprise. My family knows about it. If my children see me with laptop, with a briefcase they will be proud.

This was his point of view. His wife Sureya, who met him as a 16 year old girl while selling doughnuts on the market had a different one. Spending a lot of his income on developing his workshop and travelling to different parts of Cameroon to promote his products drove her crazy: She was disappointed that his respective success as a blacksmith and inventor haven't materialized in any form yet. They have been living in the same 10 square meter room ever since they had gotten married 12 years earlier. In the meantime Sureya gave birth to five children, two of whom died shortly after the birth, meeting the faith of many newborns on the continent. While Abakar pursued the dream of being modern and mobile she stayed at home and looked after their children, cooked, washed and occasionally went to the market:

She wants me to furnish our salon. Actually all this room should be only hers. I know she has right to it. But I tell her all the time about my project. I tell her to be patient. It will all come. Women have no patience they want everything fast, fast. he said.

Abakar had something of an universal character: an entrepreneur climbing up from zero to hero with universal family problems. His goals to make it could be found everywhere in the world and spending time with him offered and remarkable chance for cross-cultural comparisons. We decided that I will start next day and so it went for the next 10 weeks. In retrospect, reflecting on the film-making process, on everything that had happen from choosing the topic to the final cut in the editing room I see how many things happened by chance. In the end films might look well-planned, nearly inevitable but tracing back the film-making process -going through the reflexive process¹⁰, often the contrary is the case, unpredictability lies in its nature. This feature is characteristic of products of social research in general. (Davies 1999)

¹⁰ "In its most transparent guise, reflexivity expresses researchers awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it." (Davies 2007 p.7)

4. THE FILMING PROCESS

Next day in the morning I came to the market with the video-camera and started to film. Abakar did his work. *Just film and if you have questions ask.* He told me. The fact that Abakar was a craftsmen, that he run his workshop and was occupied with work helped me to get into the filming process. I could concentrate on camera details, learn the space, the conditions and become familiar with the environment without taking too much of his attention. Each of us had our own things to do. He worked and I filmed. I gradually entered the into other arenas, both spatially and in the abstract sense, into deeper layers of his personality. I became familiar with his everyday life at this stage. He was preparing the journey, wanted a patent, papers for enterprise, his wife wanted to paint and finish the additional room which he hadn't money for. His everyday life environment and his interactions with other blacksmiths at the market, his clients, people at meetings and with his family members became the focus of my filming.

I met him often in the mornings at home and we crossed the noisy market together on his old Yamaha. Sometimes we even left the children at school. On other days I came directly to the market. I was filming him in the mornings before he went to work, at his workplace when he dealt with clients and his apprentices, while eating, praying or talking with other blacksmiths. We were speaking in front of his workshop during the day and at his home in the evenings. I accompanied him to exhibitions and meetings outside of the blacksmiths market. While filming social situations I rarely asked questions and never used the butterfly microphone. I filmed from close distance to assure that his conversations would be audible. Especially in the formal bureaucratic settings, the video camera gave me a reason for being around. The status of student making film about the local craftsmen opened many doors.

Switching from one arena to the other –from the market to the offices, from offices to the exhibitions and from there to the household full of children, enable me to grasp a fuller understanding of the problems that he encountered on a daily basis. Filming a variety of situations enabled me to bear witness to the ups and downs, to understand certain bureaucratic papers and why he suddenly becomes shy in presence of bureaucrats, why he needs his son to help him read some letters, why not everyone is happy about what he is doing and why he needed me as I needed him.

Abakar, nearly invisibly to me, negotiated the access to persons at the iron market and outside of it and I felt that he genuinely cared for providing me the best possibilities for filming. He

understood that this is not only my film but also his film.

You make sure that you do your job well and I make sure that I make my job well. And leave speaking to people to me. You don't know what they say behind your back anyway. And you can be sure that they will speak about you." he told me early in the filming process.

We became something of a two person crew. Abakar quickly learnt the rules of the filming game. He informed me about his daily schedules and, for most of the time, made sure that I would be in time to catch something of importance. In hindsight, while watching my footage, I noticed that he almost acted some scenes in front of the camera, switching the conversations from Fulfulde to French, repeating certain things just in case I had missed them, or speaking about things that he thought might be interesting for me to film.

Spending most of my time with Abakar, influenced my position in regard to other blacksmiths. Basically I spent time with him and only occasionally with them. I film mostly his work and occasionally their work. This was the case because at the very beginning I decided that I want a film which follows the main character. Abakar was very mobile and the more we went through together the more a narrative was crystallizing itself.

Since I could not go with him lacking documents and being discouraged from entering Northwestern Nigeria that was permanently shook by attacks of Boko Haram.¹¹ I decided to film the tense period of preparing for the trip. Once I filmed everything extensively I also tired Abakar. and found myself caught in a predicament that I was scared to fall into before leaving for fieldwork. Narrative became bigger than life. Once more our conversation helped me. I became more and more aware of the gap between theoretical abstraction and the here and now of Abakar and other blacksmiths at the market.¹²

While Abakar was away in Abuja I spent hours on filming manual work of blacksmiths around the market. Using a tripod I carefully framed and let the camera roll, often for several minutes. This material, presented the dexterity of blacksmiths, their embodied skills in shaping and cutting iron. Rather than looking for any meaning it was meant to capture the pure work of the

¹¹ Boko Haram is an Islamic jihadist militant organisation based mainly in the northeastern Nigeria. (Cook 2011)

¹² Gary Kildea refers to that predicament in one of the interviews when he says: *If people and eventfulness of life get in the way of your abstractions than you have a problem.* Pierre Bourdieu referred to the lack of being present in the real world as "ethnocentrism of scientism", it derives from positioning oneself outside of the studied area and remaining unconscious of the gap between the practical experiences of the people who are the object of the inquiry and of theoretical models that one as social researcher seeks to develop. (Bourdieu; Wacquant 1989).

craftsmen and the being at the market. (Macdougall 2006) The time without Abakar gave me also a chance to get to know and focus more on the other blacksmiths.

My knowledge of what was important for me in this fieldwork expanded during the process and changed gradually. Filming became an hermeneutic process - the more I had the more I knew what would be relevant. My understanding of the gathered material - of the relation of the whole to its parts and the parts to the whole - expanded while watching the footage during the filming process. Sometimes we brought the TV from Abakar's brother's place and watched the material with the whole family which gave me the chance to ask about the details of conversations led in Fulfulde and all the aspects which I did not understand. Through repetitive screenings I knew what I wanted to ask, which detail of Abakar's work I would especially like to film and could prepare myself better for the next days of filming.

In retrospective one thing is for sure, I happened to be in Maroua at an important time that coincided with many events which played a role in Abakar's struggle to establish the enterprise. I was leaving Cameroon as things were moving on for him and had a feeling that the camera and my presence might have brought him in his upward mobility. As he told me *even the president is not followed with the camera for three months.*

5. EDITORIAL CHOICES

Abakar's accessibility, combined with my never ending greed for filming brought about 99 tapes of around 40 minutes each. The 4000 minutes long material consisted of Abakar's work in his workshop, numerous meetings outside of the blacksmiths market where he was confronted with people who had a higher status than him, a step-by-step production of the "improved cooker", his preparation for the journey to the Abuja and the exhibition at the Chamber of Commerce where he exposed the cooker, and material from his household.

Given the task of making a 30 minutes film (which became 52 minutes long) I was supposed to cut the 4000 minutes of material to less than 1% into a coherent understandable narrative. Since the material offered a possibility for an actor oriented film I left aside all footage that was not directly linked to Abakar and his story.¹³ I chopped the material into single scenes which constituted the fragments of his life. I wanted to include a bit of every social arena and every social persona of Abakar. The scenes selected structured into a narrative became a way to synthesise the experience from the whole fieldwork process into a sort of the ideal-type. (Henley 2006: 395)¹⁴

I included footage of his work in the workshop to show his skills and ingenious debrouillage practices, his interactions with children which could contextualize the work of young people in Sub-Saharan Africa and show also its positive dimension. I showed parts his family life which would give voice to his wife and add another dimension to his wish of being modern. I also included scenes with the improved cooker, an object with a remarkable biography (Kopytoff 1986), as well as the journey to Abuja which got him to meet officials.¹⁵ Additionally, in order to give some feeling of being at the blacksmith market I choose some fragments of the longer takes presenting blacksmiths at work and added them every now into the film narrative.

The interviews with Abakar – in which he philosophized in his own way about his life (Gullestad;1996) offered a chance to look at the world around him from his perspective- ascribed meaning to the scenes. I tried to peak these fragments of interviews which seemed to touch the most universal side of humanity and could portray Abakar as a character that could live in other parts of

¹³ The purely observational material consisting of long sequences presenting blacksmith at work offers a possibility of making another film or an installation with multiple screens. An example of the film made from long carefully framed takes is *SchoolScapes* by David Macdougall.

¹⁴ Paul Henley called the quest for narrative *the guilty secret of ethnographic film-making* as it inevitably breaks with chronology in favour of coherency. (Henley 2006)

¹⁵ His day to day life made me think about universal stories like *Salesman* or *Celso and Cora*. Films that could be understood without a detail knowledge of a local environment.

the world. Finally subtitling enabled me to solve the problem of repetition, pauses, or small language mistakes that Abakar did during the interviews.

6. THEORETICAL REFLECTIONS

Abakar's life story and the various events that we went through together present an individual who wants to achieve success, who wants to make it, but who lacks resources to do so. One could argue that it is just his story, that he is not an *ideal type* representative of the entire Cameroonian society, or even all blacksmiths with whom he is working at the market. Obviously he is not. There is no such person but his story offers a possibility to comprehend larger structural issues shared by people living in Sub Saharan Africa. Abakar shared one feature with most people. He wanted to improve the life conditions of his family and achieve success. To have a good life and achieve success may mean different things to different people, and in different cultural settings but the wish to improve ones life conditions remains universal and creates a common ground for comparison. (Jackson 2005; 2011)

Life stories are of anthropological relevance because they entail a form of re-personalisation and provide a basis for insight into society. (Altern; Holtedahl 2000 p. 63; Gullestad 1996) Through storytelling private events can be translated into public stories and vice versa public events can be portrayed as having the impact of individuals. (Jackson 2002)¹⁶ Abakar's life history offered the potential for the insight into the social setting he came from at the same time showing how macro processes influence underprivileged people and how inequalities of chances are being reproduced in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Although Abakar responds differently to the social changes that happen around him than most of the people who surround him at the market this uniqueness offers an interesting way of telling something about his environment. How is he perceived by people around? why is he controversial?, what helps him to be comparatively successful in eyes of other blacksmiths? Why is he underprivileged when he leaves the blacksmith market?

Abakar's uniqueness that distinguished him from other blacksmiths at the market is grounded in his entrepreneurial talent. Entrepreneurship as a concept was long noticed by anthropologist. It was introduced to anthropology by New Zealander anthropologist Cyrill Belshaw in 1955 and reused by Fredrik Barth and his colleagues to study the impact of social change on the communities of northern Norway. (Barth et al. 1972) Barth, in line with Belshaw, stressed four characteristics of entrepreneurship: management of a business unit, profit making, business innovation and

¹⁶ Margaret Mead once said that one of the possible ways of approaching and understanding a culture is to see what sort of biography it regards as embodying a successful social career. (Kopytoff 1986:66)

uncertainty bearing, and defined an entrepreneur as: “someone who takes the initiative in administering resources and pursues an expansive economic policy.” Entrepreneurs become crucial in times of social change acting as brokers introducing newness on local arenas and mobilizing people around them often thanks to his personal charisma. (Barth et.all 1972 p. 4-7)

In Africa successful entrepreneurship and financial success is often linked to connections with the world of politics and corrupt practices. Entrepreneurs are often mysterious figures., their success an enigma.¹⁷ (Bayart 1993; Waage 2006.; Holtedahl 2010) Abakar was not in the same league as the few of rich industrialists. He was a small fish. He was an example of a beginner entrepreneur who lacked resources needed to function on arenas where he aspires to accommodate himself in future. He is an entrepreneur who hopes to give better chance to his children because as his says *for him for some things it is to late*. He lacked skills, resources, knowledge, information which could bring him profits. In short he lacked different forms of capital: cultural, economic, social and symbolic as understood by French sociologists and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu.(Bourdieu 1986)

For Bourdieu social world was accumulated history and life was an unique game which contrary to games of chance is unlikely to bring fast and unexpected wins. It is due to the unequal distribution of capital, the unequal access to privileged resources that reproduction of inequalities is possible. Consequently, people from more privileged backgrounds have a bigger chance of choosing the desired way of life, or simply bigger chance to *make it*. (Bourdieu 1986) Abakar's life story gives a chance to observe the reproduction of inequalities. But it also proves that there is always a possibility to climb up the social ladder and break the viscous circle of reproduction. As underprivileged as he was Abakar entered arenas closed to an ordinary blacksmith. His excursions into unknown social arenas provided material for insight.

Abakar lacked the cultural capital in form of language skills and abilities to read and write with ease. He was short of social capital in form of connections to people in possession of power who could support him in his struggles to establish the enterprise. Coming from the poor family he lacked economic capital in form of money and possessions. Last but not least he lacked the symbolic capital, the social recognition. His shortages in *capital* were linked to his background and his personal history; or in other words linked to his *habitus* and the *fields* where it was shaped.

¹⁷ Maybe nothing better displays the difference between rich and poor and the outer and inner circles of power and politics as residences of powerful people in Africa. The film *Caste in Africa* by Lisbet Holtedahl focuses on the process of building of a castle in Norther Cameroon by the rich industrialist Al Hajji Jawri. (Holtedahl 2010: 165)

Bourdieu defined *habitus* as – *that which one has acquired but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions.[..]*(Bourdieu: 1993:86) and stressed that it is open to transformations. „*Habitus as a product of social conditionings, and thus of a history (unlike character), is endlessly transformed.* (Bourdieu 1994:7)

Abakar acquired his *habitus* and his capital on the streets of Maroua and in the various workshops around the city. These were the *fields*, which gave him certain resources and which derived him from others.¹⁸ There he dealt with skilled manual workers who spoke Fulfulde but no French, who tapped hammers but could not write, who learned from stories not from books. He carried his history of his life and people with whom he grew up everywhere he went. Leaving the blacksmiths market and entering bureaucratic arenas and formal settings led to an effect of *hysteresis* – to a mismatch between his *habitus* and the environments characterised by another unwritten sets of rules and behaviours. (Bourdieu 1977: 78)

Abakar's underprivileged position resulting from the lack of bureaucratic¹⁹ *know how and* low status of an uneducated blacksmith led to symbolic violence - to the tacit form of domination in which the dominated side, in this case Abakar, who was short of the institutional capital and cultural capital unconsciously reproduced this dominance by his humbleness in front of people who are higher than him. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002)²⁰ Stepping into offices – those air-conditioned alien spaces where the power was unequally distributed his usual easy and direct way of being and his high self – esteem gave way to insecurity. His answers were reduced to minimum.. Such symbolic violence was constantly reproduced through small rituals.. Excessive praising of officials, multiple *Merci* and *Thank You*, *bending downs* and *downcast faces* stressed the unequal distribution of power.

His different statuses -craftsmen – performing manual work as opposed to the elite who does not work physically²¹, blacksmith – caring the social stigma linked to the past, uneducated man who

¹⁸ Bourdieu defines field as :“a structured social space ..[..](that) contains people who dominate and people who are dominated. ..[..]All the individuals in this universe bring to the competition all the (relative) power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and, as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu 1998 : 40-41) One can say that household, school, streets of Maroua, various workshops and above all the blacksmith market were Abakar's fields.

¹⁹ Etymologically the word bureaucracy derives from the French word *bureau* – desk or office – with the Greek word *κράτος* *kratos* – rule or political power. Bureaucratic administration means fundamentally domination through knowledge

²⁰ Bourdieu defined symbolic violence as : the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2002: 167) Symbolic violence is such a powerful means of control because both sides are being unconscious that it is exercise.

²¹ Tim Ingold points to the inferior status of craftsmen as opposed to artist as a historic development. The etymological roots of the terms art and technology show that their meaning has changed significantly in the course of history. Originally “ars” and “tekhne” meant much the same, namely skill of the kind associated with craftsmanship. From the 18th century onwards there has

nonetheless wishes to enter the formal sector and lead the enterprise- vis -a- vis the people in possession of power, represented by politicians, bureaucrats, business people and educated elite, was low.²² Also the status of the blacksmiths market- understood as a field- in relation to the fields of power occupied by the politicians and bureaucrats on the local and global arenas was low.

The individual history of Abakar and the collective story of the blacksmith market touch upon the problem of excluding people with lower status and entire fields occupied by people of lower status. Anthropologists often escape the generalizations about Africa hiding behind the basic premise of anthropology – detailed knowledge about local communities. (Ferguson 2006) In fact many problems of blacksmiths are universal because life of individuals even in local is dependent on the „determinants which are not locally produced“ and people from lower strata, with low status have usually little if any control over the macro processes which influence their life. (Grønhaug 1975 p .1-8)

Abakar's day to day struggles offer the potential to grasp the interplay between structuring forces limiting him to to achieve his goals, and his agency, understood as the ability to take life in his owns hands. In line with existential anthropology as proposed by new Zealand anthropologist Michael Jackson life reveals itself as *a field of struggle rather than a settled state and the human being as a constant becoming, as a process of reinventing oneself while adjusting to new circumstances in the best possible way* .(Jackson 2011; IX)

been a stronger tendency to distinguish between manual and intellectual labor, and between *art* associated with creativity and imagination and *technology* linked to habitual bodily skills. (Ingold 2001:17-18)

²² craftsmen, blacksmith, uneducated man who wishes to enter the formal sector and lead the enterprise, were the most important statuses defying Abakar as social person outside of the compound where he was primarily husband and father.

7. BLACKSMITHING IN A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Blacksmiths from the iron market in Maroua are more than just craftsmen who turn scrap iron into objects of everyday use. Iron metallurgy had a profound impact on the foundation of states and metropolis in ancient Africa. Iron revolutionized the military arts and played a crucial role in development of land use and agriculture. Smelting practices and ironworking were ritualized practices closely linked to the social organization and the cosmology of a given society. Apart from smelting and the processing of iron blacksmiths served as healers performing rites to cure illnesses, promote fertility in women; prevent child mortality. Iron objects symbolized the power of persons in their possession. Various parts of forge like hammers, tongs, hearth and blower nozzle played a role in rituals and smelting practices were symbolic metaphors of sexual intercourse. Given the importance of metalworking blacksmiths were universally considered a group apart. (Childs and Killick 1993; Bocoum 2004; Haland 2004)²³

In Far North Cameroon blacksmith were divided into two competitive groups: Muslim and Montagnards. Montagnards was a term that encompassed numerous small scale societies in the Mandara mountains that practised traditional religions. In most of the Montagnards societies blacksmiths formed an endogamous caste and apart from smelting and forging of iron performed a variety of traditional functions including divinations and the disposal of the dead. Women specialised in pottery and midwifery.²⁴ (David, Roberts 1988, 130)

Up until the 1950's, the Montagnards smelted iron in bloomery furnaces and held a powerful position because of the access to the iron ore which could be found in the local dry river beds. After World War II the increased import of iron stock, vehicles and machinery from the industrialised West started to appear in towns of the Far North enabling Muslim smiths who

²³ Iron metallurgy has been crucial in the development of the world. Iron is the most common element of planet Earth. It makes up 80% of its core and 7 % of Earth's crust it is the most commonly used metal because of its ubiquity and ease of extraction. (Bocoum et al. 2004) There have been multiple theories concerning the origin of iron smelting in Africa. Some argue for diffusion of such practices from the territories of today's Egypt through Nubia to West and East Africa and an independent transmission from Phoenician North Africa across the Sahara. Other scholars suggest an independent invention of iron smelting in Africa referring to archaeological reports dating the first that iron practices in Sub-Saharan Africa well before 500BC on the territories of today's Nigeria and Niger. (Childs and Click 1993)

²⁴ The best description of the role of blacksmiths in one of the Montagnard groups is offered by the Dutch anthropologist Walter van Beek in his monograph about the Kapsiki. *The Kapsiki of the Mandara Hills* (Van Beek 1987). In a given fragment is exemplary of many features shared by blacksmiths in many places in Africa. *The blacksmiths or rerhE ,, as an endogamous group, they form a close-knit subgroup with institutionalized relations of social inferiority with the main population. They are the specialist of the society. Blacksmiths forge iron, cast bronze, divine the future, heal the sick assist in sacrifices, make music and bury the dead. They furnish the rest of the Kapsiki with tools essential for survival: agricultural implements, weapons, medicine and utensils. The raw materials are available in the immediate vicinity: iron ore is found as magnetite in dry river beds. Today the melting of ore is rapidly disappearing, as iron from old cars and drums is readily available. Blacksmiths of various villages still forge tools and seem to compete with the externally produced tools imported by Hausa and Fulani merchants. The iron bars have lost their former function as limited purpose money, although they still serve as ceremonial gifts.* (van Beek 1987: 22)

operated in bigger towns on the plains to gained monopoly of the iron supply.(David, Robertson 1988: 129) In the second half of the 20th century scrap iron replaced bloomery iron and social changes went hand in hand with technological changes. The importance of casted blacksmiths declined and many of those who stayed in villages started switching to farming. Many others started to convert to Islam and move to urban areas. The sense of unity rooted in shared religious beliefs encouraged cooperation, innovation and specialization. Blacksmith Muslim started to use western sledgehammers, standardize the forms of tools and specialize their products by using, templates. (David, Robertson 1988)²⁵

Urban setting of Maroua, crossroads for people from many ethnic groups, with different social organization, with a division of labour where the original social context of blacksmithing - its connection to rituals, divinations is missing, brought blacksmithing even further from its original context. Iron markets have become places of recycling and recuperation and many people turn to blacksmiths in search of cheaper agricultural tools. *Now, we are out of the village so it is gone with tradition. Once in the city it is anyway modern.* I was told by the son of the president sitting in their workshop. *...But take Abakar for example. He is normally not a blacksmiths. He didn't come from a blacksmith family. We accept him because he came here, he learnt and he is good at what he does.* Members of ancient powerful blacksmiths lineages saw the difference between Abakar and themselves.

²⁵ Both standardization and specialization are features of modernity and will be discussed in chapter 9.

8. THE RYTHM OF THE MARKET

7 days a week, 365 days a year, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., the same monotonous concert of hammer clangs welcomed the customers who came to the market in search for cheap tools made of recuperated iron. For blacksmiths there was no weekend break, no vacations, no insurance policy and no retirement as is common in most of the countries from which car bodies and scrap iron lying around their workshop came from. Apart from cars they bought smaller scrap iron parts and iron objects from people who wanted to get rid off old damaged stuff and get some money in exchange. Wheelbarrows, buckets or bowls landed on the heaps next to each other until they leave a market in a completely new form.

The iron market was the main spot for selling recycled agricultural articles in town and in the region. Reusing scrap iron meant a drop in the prices by at least a half compared to the objects sold in the most popular Cameroonian chain *Foku*, which offered a similar assortment of tools to that of the blacksmith market. The biggest advantage of the manually manufactured products, besides the lower price, was their high quality. In the era of expanding standardisations and production on assembly lines the possibility to have it the way you want it, to sit together with the blacksmiths and supervise their work had its value. The ploughs and wheelbarrows made by blacksmith were not only cheaper but more solid and adjusted to the local environment than the standard tools.

The usual workshop at the iron market consists of a traditional leather bellow, a charcoal fire place, and anvils. The main tools are hammers, scissors and pincers. Here iron is preheated before it is shaped with hammers. A blacksmith or an apprentice sits and operates the bellows while a second blacksmith, in most cases the head of the workshop, makes the object by shaping it with hammer. (pic.5) In workshops like these, blacksmiths make hoes, ploughs, some bigger knives and various objects made on demand. A few of the workshops specialized in tinsmithing: shaping lighter scrap iron with hammers and big scissors without pre-heating the metal before. Tinsmithing did not demand anything but anvils hammer and scissors. Such workshops were specialized in doing buckets, bowls, the upper parts of wheelbarrows and all that did not demand pre-heating. Some workshops cooperated with each other producing only certain parts which were linked together subsequently. Blacksmiths oriented themselves according to the seasons and feasts, increasing the production of some tools when needed. Hoes to prepare the fields are especially sold in summer, most slaughtering knives are produced in the weeks preceding the Muslim feast of Tabaski.

The problem for all blacksmith at the market was the lack of capital to buy primary material in bigger quantities that would enable them too take advantage of sudden offers and drop the prices even more. Trapped in a viscous circle, blacksmiths were forced to live from one day to the other. All the money they earned at the market were spent on daily expenses, whatever remained went on a bit of new iron. Saving any money was impossible.

Blacksmiths were the proper examples of bricoleurs - picking up and juxtaposing the finite number of already existing elements to construct something new.²⁶(Levi-Strauss 1966: 19) For bricoleur everything goes so long as it leads to the more or less planned effect. In today's global world which facilitate the global flow of artefacts, newness increasingly appears as a result of re-contextualization. (Eriksen 2003)

More than just a working place the iron market was a second home to the blacksmiths and for many of the young children it was, a place where they spend most of their lives. A place with its own rhythm, rules and power relations that became visible to me after some time. At 6 o'clock in the morning, when the sun was slowly raising over the hills the first pot of tea was prepared. Blacksmiths start to gather around their workshops. They great each other, have a chat, drink tea, light the fires on their working places and slowly, slowly start to work. No rush, no looking at a watch to start on time, no managers controlling the work. Everyone here is the architect of his own fortune. Everyone knew each other. The men were fathers to all the children, and all the children were grandchildren to the retired blacksmiths. "Baba" was the name by which young blacksmiths and children addressed the old blacksmiths who came to the market to chat. Babas were always around. Their presence gave a feeling of old times. Women were carrying big buckets and bowls full of doughnuts, and potatoes, young boys and girls sold tea and instant coffee with powdered milk and occasionally a trolley with fruits passed by, usually just before all the hammers stopped for 15 minutes at around 3:30 p.m and than again at 5:30 p.m. for a common prayer at the main workshop on the entrance to the market. On Fridays some blacksmiths left the market to attend the mosque and on Sundays a few Christian blacksmiths took the day off. The work went on until around 6 o'clock in the evening, and everyone ended as they wished, some working after dark to finish an important command.

²⁶ The concept of *bricolage*, was by a passage in Claude Levi-Strauss "Pensee sauvage": "*His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with 'whatever is at hand', that is to say with a set of tools and materials which is always finite and is also heterogeneous because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, or indeed to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock or to maintain it with the remains of previous constructions or destructions.*" (Levi-Strauss 1966 p. 19)

Children, the youngest around six were everywhere: running around the market, rumbling through the heaps of scrap iron, playing on the cars, inside of cars, below the cars but above all they were here in order to take their first steps in blacksmithing. The iron market serves as a working place, a school and a playground in one. Boys used to sit in larger groups tapping the hammers and occasionally abandoning their tasks altogether to play until they were asked to get back to assist the older blacksmiths with blowing the bellows or turning the wheel and one more time off they went. The older they get the less freedom they have. Due to the lack of social security big families and large networks of alliances are the only reliable assurance for the future. *“All our children grow up in front of us with us. Grow up with the work. When there's no school they often come here and work. The children are our retirement. In Europe you call it pension, don't you”* Abakar explained to me the presence of children at the market.

In recent years the market has become a popular tourist sight seeing destination. To international tourists who visited Maroua the creative debrouillage practices of local blacksmiths were something of an attraction. For a small amount of money visitors are offered a guided tour through the market by one of the blacksmiths. The tour made a circle around the market with stops at workshops with the most interesting practices. Starting with the ready made objects, tourists were shown ancient and modern blasting techniques, how iron is twisted into buckets and bowls and linked without welding, how big truck wheels are cut with huge hammers, turned into smaller parts and become ploughs, how knives are shaped and sharpened. Tourists asked about the shocking differences between working conditions in European workshops and factories and the conditions the blacksmiths were working in. Each tour ended with a visit to the selling stands where tourists bargained with vendors over the prices of knives – most popular products among the foreigners. The revenue from the tour goes to the “common box” and is used for urgent needs such as an accident or the sudden illness of one of the blacksmith.

The link to the past was symbolically personified by the retired president of the market who used sit on his chair in front of the biggest atelier, observing the work of other blacksmiths. President Sali didn't work any more but he still came to the market every day. It was under his guidance that most of the blacksmith at the market took their first steps as blacksmiths. The president was an archetype of the blacksmith of the past, used to work in the old traditional way. He was of Mafa origin from the village around Mokolo(Montagnard), one of the most important blacksmiths centres in Far North Cameroon. Nowadays his role seemed to be confined to the public display of a tradition true to the profession.



Pic.1 Cars brought to the blacksmith market.



Pic. 2 Usual shop at the blacksmith market



Pic.3 Members of Abakar's association Gic ADAAM.



Pic.4 President (2nd from left) with the blacksmith at his workshop.



Pic.5 Usual workshop at the market.



Pic.6 Boys operating the wheel at Abakar's workshop.



Pic.7 The modern blacksmith.

9. BRICOLAGE VS ASSEMBLY LINES

We were already on our way home when Abakar pointed to a huge lorry fully loaded with scrap iron that was standing in front of iron market and said.

- *Hey maybe you should film that?*
- *Film What? That truck? What for?*
- *Interesting, no?*

In fact I did not find that truck particularly interesting in visual terms, but I became curious about the lorry. Why was it here? Where did it come from? Where was it going? Once more Abakar pointed to something that I should be curious about. We started to talk to the driver and the first details weren't surprising. The lorry carried all the scrap iron that no blacksmiths, no mechanic or any other bricoleur in the area could use any more. It went 800 km south to Douala, the industrial capital of Cameroon and one of the biggest West African ports.

- *But you know the truck driver continued sometimes they ship the iron to India.*
- *What? Where?*
- *Yeah, they ship some of these things back to India*

The 15 workshops scattered at the foothill on the outskirts of Maroua, and the 100 blacksmiths who come to work there every morning are linked to distant places in far corners of the world. But the power relations are unequally distributed and blacksmith are on the periphery rather than in the centre of the global world order. This is an effect of the last few hundred years of the global history.

Industrial production together with the idea of nation-state, democracy and a market economy became the corner stone of modernity. Money, a pure commodity, and disembedding token has substituted the personal forms of exchange. and enabled the spatial separation of owner and possessions and transactions without direct personal engagement (Giddens 1991: 24)²⁷ As a result of all these characteristics, modernity became more dynamic than any previous type of social order. (Giddens 1998: 94).

In the modern era the world works but we often don't know how. Modernity became the era of blind trust in expert systems, an era of just a few competent people possessing knowledge and skills that other people are dependent on.(Giddens 1991: 79-92)

²⁷ Giddens discussion of money is strongly influenced Karl Marx and Georg Simmel.

Since the early 1990's the term globalization has become omnipresent in various debates in the field of social sciences.²⁸ Anthony Giddens has described globalization as “*the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.*” (Giddens 1991 p. 64). Globalization is characterised by dis-embedding (the deriving of context), acceleration, standardization, interconnectedness, movement. (Eriksen 2007 p. 8-9). In line with the classic “left wing” attitude, globalization is perceived as an evil process in which the profit seeking is the driving force. (Eriksen 2003) Cultural neo-imperialism, macdonaldisation, cocacolasation and various other terms have accompanied the term globalization in literature and debates that have stressed the homogenising effects of global processes and pointed to the leading role of the United States in spreading artefacts and ideas around the globe.

Most sociologists and anthropologists however have paid attention to the reciprocal effect of globalisation processes in which the globally widespread ideas and objects find their local specific ways of use in local context. Notions like glockalisation, creolisation and heterogeneity among others have been used in order to stress the agency of local communities and their ability to make use of global commodities, technologies and ideas to stress their own identity.(Eriksen 2003; 2007; Hahn 2004; Hannerz 1987)

And here were the blacksmiths 800 km from Douala and thousands of kilometres from the Asian companies from where their scrap iron comes and to which it goes back. Their practices exemplify glockalisation or rather sociocultural-appropriation,(Hahn 2004) the creative process of redefining and making something to one's own.

No matter how ingenious the bricolage practices of blacksmiths are, they are above all a proof of unequal possibilities of development and technological change in the era of immense possibilities for narrowing the gap between societies. They show the globalization from the bottom which questions some of the ideas about globalization The metaphor of flows proposed by Arjun Appadurai²⁹ offers rather poor metaphor especially in terms of Africa. Globalization in respect to

²⁸ The cross-cultural contacts between various societies have started to be the subject of anthropological research nearly a hundred years before the term globalization was coined. By the end of 19th century evolutionism, by than only paradigm in social sciences was challenged by diffusionism, a theoretical stream often relayed in English-speaking anthropology as the German school (Barnard 2004 p; Hahn 2008, page 194) One of the characteristics of this theory was the notion of *culture areas* divided in *centres*, and *peripheries*. Diffusionists set their interested in tracing the cross cultural contacts between societies by localizing the same elements, mostly artefacts in distinct places around the globe. The recipients however were considered as passive and uncreative individuals who adopt and implement the elements in new environment in their "original" way of use.

²⁹ Appadurais *Modernity at large. Cutural Dimensions of globalization (1996)* became one of the most influential texts in the last 20 years. His analysis of the global spread of modernity however offers a view from the air Stories such

African continent is rather selective, discontinuous and works in a point – to -point fashion. Networks „span the globe“ but do not cover it, they skip rather than flow through the territory and Africa just does not suit the dominant globalization narrative”. (Ferguson 2006: 14) Africa rather provides examples which support the model of a single capitalist world system divided into powerful centres and weak peripheries. (Wallerstein 2002) The dominant discourses about development and Africa either stress that globalization have bypassed the continent or that the continent has actively suffered from the globalization processes. (Carmody 2010:1)

What characterised the last century were the increased efforts to link science to technology in an attempt to achieve economic or other national goals.“ (Klovdahl 1993 :569) The process of industrialization enabled mass production based on principles of the division and specialization of human labour and the use of tools, machinery, and automated equipment in the production of standard, interchangeable parts and products. Such manufacturing processes aim for the highest possible gain by the lowest possible cost or energy use. The bigger the mass of production the lower its costs. This philosophy led to the expansion of European and subsequently the American market. Industrialization process moved away from the coal, iron and steam-power to the electricity in the late 19th century, and now, in the early twenty-first century, the technological base for further industrialization lies in the information industries, based on electronics and the computers (Aitken 2002)

Anthropologists stress that rather than about technology one should speak about sociotechnical systems. (Pfaffenberger 1988)³⁰ Technologies are bound to a particular environment, values, and norms and any behavior that is technological has political, social, and symbolic implications. Creating a new technology inevitably alters social relations. and questions the prevalent ideologies which define what 'works' and is 'successful' (Pfaffenberger 1988 : 244-250)

Blacksmiths come from a society where their technology was linked to another system of social relation. Smelting and working of iron were integrated in the social and political life. Knowledge in African societies was transmitted in oral form, from generation to generation. Blacksmiths are an example of experts, whose expertise gradually decrease with the

as Abakar's, grounded in local show that Appadurai analysis however interesting and in many ways groundbreaking is rather one-dimensional. It can apply to urban centres but not necessary to peripheries. It is interesting however how anthropology as every field has dominant theories, notions, catchy phrases or dominant narratives which become commonly quoted. (Bruner 1986)

³⁰ The most common definitions of technology stress man's control over nature without paying sufficient attention to the social context in which technologies come into being and to the non productive aspects of technology. Technology is defined any action by which “man seeks to modify or control his natural environment.” (Spier in: Pfaffenberger 1992: 497)

industrialization in distant parts of the world. Their knowledge does not give them the same power as it gave them before. They have lost their dignity. The process of disembedding – a progressive cutting out of technical from social relations which is one of the characteristic of modernity - became their drama. (Pfaffenberger 1988: 242; Ingold 1997: 108)

Blacksmiths have found themselves in the state of socio technical confusion. They know that there is no way back to the old ways of working and to the old social order at the same time lacking the tools to transform and improve their working conditions and social status. They are bricoleurs in the era of standardised, specialised products made on assembly lines. Their knife is not the only knife, their bowl is not the only bowl.

10. THE MODERN BLACKSMITH

Dressed in an *Adidas* T-shirt and with *New York-Fashion* sunglasses over his eyes, about to turn his workshop in a modern enterprise one could not escape the feeling that Abakar was different from the other blacksmiths. A lone wolf, living in the future rather than in the past.

As I learned one evening a hurtful episode that brought him on the stony path which led him to the blacksmith market and the experiences from the childhood motivated him ever since:

I come from a poor family. My mother and father had never had any money. It was one woman from the city who bought me school stuff when I was young. One day at school they asked us to bring 200 CFA for a pot for water. So I told my father at home that the school principal had asked for 200 CFA. He started to shout at me. "No! I returned home without any rest and you start bothering me." So I returned to school without money and the principal said: "You didn't tell your parents, so now you'll understand me" He took my hands and hit me ten times, five on each hand. It hurt me. I was scared.

I returned home and told my father all that had happened, but then he yelled at me: "You don't let me rest!" "What do you ask me for?" "School! School! What is school? Have I been to school? Get lost! This was the moment I said to myself, No, not any more! From that moment I used to leave from home with my school-bag but I didn't go to school any more. I was going to the place where they cultivate potatoes. Over there I used to hide my school bag in a hole and I went to pick potatoes. They paid me 200-300 CFA. I earned money over there. My father found out and this was the end. He said that I will never return to school.

Deprived of the possibility to receive a school education Abakar entered into street commerce. He shared his fate with many other children on the streets of Maroua. *On se débrouille* became his motto. The acquisition of cultural capital in the form of language skills, ability to read and write either stops very early on or never starts at all. Abakar started to support his family by selling everything from small plastic mirrors to onions and chickens to petrol.

"When I was 12-13 I started to help my father to support the family: I was doing small street commerce with him. This is when I realized that in order to do the trade you need the capital and because in my family there was no one who could support me with the capital for small trade I asked God for a profession; by profession I mean skills that would allow me to leave home with

empty hands and come back with money. And one day while I was selling petrol in my neighbourhood I came across people doing tinsmithing . At first they started to mock me, they said “Hey you wouldn’t be able to this kind of job, and so on” ,so, I asked them to let me try to and this is how I started to work with them. I thought this is something which can bring me money. People brought different objects, buckets, watering cans, and I repaired them the same way as Nasir (Abakar's younger brother) does nowadays in my workshop. I always had money so I said to myself: This is my job! I established my own workshop at my household. Since it went well I decided that I should go and work in public. After only three months I asked people at the blacksmith market if I can come and work with them and they agree. Once at the market I decided to learn blacksmithing. In the beginning I couldn’t do the basic things. I started from the beginning and after one year I started to work with a hammer. This was the way I learnt tinsmithing first in my neighbourhood and than blacksmithing at the iron market. This way I already knew two different professions. than I decided to learn welding. I went to the welding workshop in the city and asked if they could give me the material to weld. He agreed and from that moment each time we made wheelbarrows at the iron market I would bring them to the city to weld. After 3 years, when I had a bit of money I asked if I can establish my own workshop and they agreed. This is my history.“

As he recalls he never had much of support, neither from his family nor from his neighbours who mocked him for trying to devote himself to blacksmithing, a field associated with impurity . Stigma over blacksmithing remained strong even years after many of the traditional functions of blacksmiths, ceased to be practised in the cities.

„A lot of people came to my father saying: 'Hey your son Abakar wants to become a blacksmith` My mother was against it. But I told her: 'How can you know where my future success lies.` Maybe this is what will help you. And this is it. This is what changed the entire household. Before the household wasn't like this. I am the one who installed the light here.. the one who brought the paint to this house. When I was born there was nothing here. Zero. Our father brought us to the world. But nothing more. He had no means to support the family. No one brought me anywhere so that I could learn something.

In contrast to many other blacksmiths at the market who continued the family tradition. Abakar had no one above him telling him what is allowed and what isn't. His first workshop was the street and the experiences shaped his character. He learned to count on himself and to go forward against all odds taking advantage of every opportunity to learn new skills. Blacksmithing

for Abakar has always been a business. Impossible was nothing so long it proved effective and brought profit.

Soon after establishing his own workshop Abakar started to modernize the workshop introducing changes which were controversial and met with suspicion around the market. He substituted the traditional leather bellows that were used to blow the air to the heart with a bicycle wheel with a handle.(pic. 5) There was no doubt about the practical advantage of this change. The traditional way of using the bellows demands hands which went through the long process of embodiment during hours of practice. Using the wheel to supply the air could turn every child running around the market or even a customer who comes to watch the blacksmiths working on his order into an assistant. *They told me I do such things because I did not inherit blacksmithing. But look now, nearly everyone has abandoned the old way and installed the wheel.*

A turning point for Abakar was a visit by an European development project team eager to invest 400 Euro in providing electricity to one of the workshops. *They went everywhere but gave it to me. They must have realised that it will pay off with me,* he recalled

Indeed it did pay off. Because of the electricity supply one innovation followed the other. Abakar installed the light, started to cut larger iron parts with machines and constructed a welding station inside a small clay storage where he kept all his tools. Abakar's workshop became a place where tradition gave way to modernity. *“When I brought the electricity here, people said No! I wanted to install this small electricity generator inside and they said No! One cannot do it! With everything they said : You can't!, You can't! And I did it! And I will make sure that the enterprise also works.* Behind his words was Abakar's nature.

Because Abakar was seeking to embrace every innovation possible and to change old, acknowledged ways of working his relationship with the old retired president was rather cold. I asked him once about the president, the answer was *“Oh, Yes yes, he is acclaimed. ” ”When he was younger, he was praised by everyone for his skills. He was like I am now!”* Modesty wasn't Abakar's strongest virtue. He was convinced about his superiority at the iron market and stressed it on numerous occasions.

Thanks to his comparably better equipped workshop, with a welding station, a machine to cut iron, and his knowledge of tinsmithing, blacksmithing and welding he specialized in items that went beyond the product repertoire of the rest of the blacksmiths at the market. Besides his improved cooker he made wheelbarrows, ploughs, trolleys, rakes, and above all commissioned orders like bars for fences, coffers, entrance doors and even saves for money and jewellery.

Additionally his workshop was as a big repair station. People dropped by with their damaged buckets, bowls, cookers, iron boxes, and Abakar with his brother fixed the objects and put them back to life, while boys were making spoons, their small contribution to the product assemblage displayed in the shop.

The success of his workshop changed the power relations at the whole market. Abakar wanted it big. *“If you don't have a welding station as I have now..if blacksmiths do their ploughs they have to come to me and ask me to weld. What do you think? Does it mean that they are independent? For me to be a blacksmiths is not to be able to turn a small piece of iron. If someone comes to you ask you for 1000 wheelbarrows in this and this time, can you do it? If you can not do it what kind of blacksmiths are you?”*

Abakar wanted it big and all of his actions were directed towards being as self-sufficient as possible. While other blacksmiths sold their products through independent vendors, he became the first one at the market to have his own shop. In the case of trip, illness or any other unexpected situation that prevented him from working and earning money on a daily basis the vendor could buy products from other blacksmiths at the market and sell these products in Abakar's shop. The shop ensured his mobility and security of his family in times when he travels.

He already had electricity, own shop, association. And the changes continued. A year after he had installed the welding station the Italian engineer appeared at the market to follow up on what he used it for. *He told me that I am the one who had developed most, and he saw that I was making a trolley at this time. He gave me his drafting of the trolley, that he himself had made in the 1970's and asked if I can make something like that. I did the trolley but he came back and did not like it. He criticized it. So I corrected it and he was happy. I exposed it at the “Comice Agro-pastoral” in Ebolowa. and I won!* The contest in southern Cameroon visited by the president of Cameroon and many other officials was his biggest success so far. He made a name among local officials responsible for the artisanal sector.

Manual skills were his *embodied cultural capital*³¹ and the driving force for his upward mobility. Thanks to his skills and creative thinking he started to travel, to invent things, to meet people outside of the iron market. His embodied cultural capital in form of skills helped him to expanding his social (make contacts) and economic capital (earn enough money to support the family).

³¹One of the fundamental features of embodied cultural capital is the time which has to be invested in order to acquire it. (Bourdieu 1986: 81)

But he had still to little of this embodied cultural capital to achieve a bigger success, a half of what was needed. He could tap the hammer, bent the iron come up with interesting ideas. But he could not express himself in fluent French, He could not write and read with ease. Additionally nothing revealed the embodied history he carried in himself in a more obvious way than his use of the official language. Even though most of the interactions in offices in Maroua are in Fulfulde, some formal settings demand French. Skipping to *haut French* and trying to construct sentences using more sophisticated syntax, formal grammatical structures which were supposed to sound like in the radio revealed his background immediately. Once after Abakar tried to skip to *haut French* in front of camera (which mostly led us to nowhere) and after I ask him to speak the way he does normally he commented on the issue of language which exemplifies in a good way the connection between *habitus, field* and *capital*:

“You know my French.. that's spoken French, it's not something that you will encounter at the university..you know something on a high level. The majority of craftsmen here in Cameroon do not express themselves in good French. You cannot find people with very good French among blacksmiths. People who have been to school don't work like I do. You wouldn't work as a craftsmen. Maybe in the near future it will change.”

Abakar worked hard to change the perception of blacksmiths. Thanks to his success in various exhibitions and his active participation in many meetings of the Craftsmen Union Abakar got to know state employees from institutions such as the *Chamber of Commerce* and the *Ministry of small and medium enterprises* increasing his social capital Connections with officials and enabled him to get help in process of establishing the enterprise. He was especially profiting from the help of various members of the Union of Craftsmen of Extreme North (RAEN). People occupying the leading positions at RAEN were themselves craftsmen but at the same they were educated, fluent in French and familiar with the use of internet. They travel, organize meetings and master the language of bureaucracy so alien to Abakar.

“Since I haven't done much school I have to stick to different people from NGO's, from the Union of Craftsmen and so on.. That's where I got all the information and ideas and that's why I decided to open the enterprise. That's the group of people which backs me up, which gives me strength in all my struggles.”

Kin relations and long-lasting friendships were important in far reaching projects involving money. Abakar carefully prepared the close circle of people which could form the future staff of the enterprise and took every chance possible to progress. He especially paid attention to his youngest brother Nasir. 19 years old and still unmarried, Nasir spent every day at the market. He was the only

one having access to the secret knowledge of constructing the cooker and replaced Abakar each time he was away. He also have a close contact with Hamadou, his best friend at the market who belonged to his union and worked together with his brother and children on the other side of the market. The two visited each other very often during work and occasionally spent time together outside of the market. He even revealed to me that he starts to consider one of Hamadou's sisters as a good candidate for his second wife.

Charisma, self esteem, close circle of friends and presence outside the iron market distinguished Abakar from the rest of the blacksmiths and spoke in favour of his success as a future head of the enterprise. Additionally his innovativeness, that revealed itself in the form of his improved cooker and other products also had entrepreneurial value. Bricolage more than a way of doing something is a way of confronting the reality. Bricoleur shares an important feature with the entrepreneur. Both break with conventions and standard interpretations while seeking to come up with new ideas. (Eriksen 2003) Many entrepreneurs come from a poor backgrounds and start from scratch. They develop discipline and respect for work and money. Their poor origin can at least potentially grant them respect among the unprivileged and enable them at least potentially to be the voice of unprivileged.³² There were however also shortages deriving him of the capital. They were present each time Abakar left the market and we went through quite a few of them together.

³² The multiple (positive and negative) possibilities to use the richness and political power on local arena by an successful entrepreneur is one of the topics of the film *Castle in Africa* and text *Up as a Rabbit – Down as a Lion: Socioeconomic Determinants of New Idioms of Power* by Lisbet Holtedahl.



Pic.8 President of Cameroon Paul Biya invited to Abakar's stand at the exhibition in Ebolowa.



Pic.9 Abakar greeting the former Governor of Maroua.

11. ENTERING THE FORMAL ECONOMY

There would be one person in charge of blacksmithing, one in charge of tinsmithing and one for welding. One accountant and vendor. I will construct three small storages, for blacksmithing, tinsmithing and welding.” he told me while drawing the picture on the piece of paper. Here would be the entrance with reception pointing to the place where children were tapping the spoons on the ground. This is where the accountant will be sitting and doing all the paper work., but on the computer. And there would be a gate to the whole workshop, so that the clients would not be able to enter the workshop but only the shop and reception, and all work would be done in the backyard

Abakar had everything planned. His role would be to supervise the work, travel in search of new ideas and invent things. He also wanted to train young people with help of state funding.

At a first glimpse it seemed that Abakar already had an enterprise since he buys stuff, sells stuff, hires people and works in the workshop from morning to the evening. But these activities were unregistered. Abakar's situation was representative of the situation of all blacksmiths and many other craftsmen in Cameroon. He paid a small fee for having a semi-formal status of an association. He did not pay taxes and did not receive anything from the state.

The association was the first step to create the enterprise. Abakar created it few months after he opened his workshop when he was facing threats from the state :*After 2-3 months people from the city who collect taxes came and started to take all my things away from my workshop. I came and I asked. What's wrong. They said “bring your papers here. If you don't have papers than we take these things away” I said “No, why?” I started to talk to them. This day they took 10000CFA from me for leaving my things at the market. I thought that that was bizarre. No paper??*

I went to the city to this white man working for a non governmental organization (NGO). He used to come to us often . He would tell us: “ you craftsmen should establish your own associations”. Establish your association”..I said ok..people come and take our stuff so we should get together. We will make a GIC (association) and we will see how they will help us. I gathered the elders. I said that we need an old person to lead it. They said No. You are young you are from the neighborhood. You are often in the city. You are open and so on. So it will be you. We will follow you. You will represent us. This is how we established the association.”

Running the enterprise demands a work, management abilities, honest and disciplined workers and last but not least the bureaucratic know how. It demands the capacity to operate on two completely different fields at the same time, the capacity to move between the world of hammer

clangs at the iron market, and the world of silent, air conditioned offices where bureaucrats stamp documents. Abakar definitely was at home at the iron market but the world outside demand a lot more social cultural and institutional capital that he could offer. Abakar told me once about his motivation for creating the enterprise.

Look all other profession are part of the National Employment Fund. You have mechanics, people who do welding. and so on, but why do blacksmiths never go to work with the National Employment Fund? Does it mean it 's not a profession or what? I don't think so. I am in the blacksmith sector. The first thing to do is to pay the taxes. I will open my trade register and get a taxpayer identification number. As soon as I have papers in my hand I will go to the Regional Minister and see how can I work with them..and they are ready to welcome me because all the Deputy Regional Ministers told me: "You are welcome here." I will do it.

- Since blacksmithing has never been considered a profession but rather a social role, since one did not work as a blacksmith but rather was born a blacksmiths this categorization has been socially reproduced even many years after traditional role of blacksmiths ceased to be of any importance. Abakar wanted his own voice to be heard and respected! Abakar wanted dignity! And he wanted security! But he was a member of a group that was trapped in between the “ancient” and the modern. A group who apart from himself worked without electricity and any kind of machines. Traditionally elders were respected and looked upon for the knowledge they possessed, now, since the creation of modern state institutions were not a part of formal, legal system. blacksmiths were not on any list of professions and being not on paper equals non existence.

Creating an enterprise, especially lacking even basic documents (like official marriage certificate) is a long and complicated process for a blacksmith. The main obstacle for starting a business in Cameroon is bureaucracy. It takes an average of 426 days to perform the 15 procedures needed to get a business licence. (Moyo 2010: 100)³³ The lack of infrastructure, bureaucracy and prevalent corruption hinder foreign and domestic investment hurting especially beginning entrepreneurs like Abakar, eager to pay taxes but in need of starting capital. This has further consequences because a lack of investment in entrepreneurs hinders the development of a middle class that would pay taxes and demand more quality services and infrastructure in exchange for

³³ Compared to 117 days in Angola, 40 days in USA and only 17 in South Korea. This data come from the 2010 World Bank report „Doing Business“ survey which examines how easy it is to start a business in different countries in world. Cameroon gained seven places in the 2012 index. In particular, the country has made it easier to start a small or medium business by reducing the cost, the time needed, and the relevant procedures.

their money. And the merry goes round because since there is no strong middle class, the bureaucracy, corruption and lack of infrastructure is prevails without complains from the population (since they do not pay taxes) and aid money and export of mineral resources and not taxes of local population are the basis of the state economy. (Moyo 2010)

I continued to push the topic of taxes trying to understand Abakar's wish to give part of his earnings to the state:

- *But where is advantage of paying this taxes for someone like you Abakar?*

- *Yes..hmmm..advantage If you pay the taxes it is to pay the the administration, the army and everything, the whole state functions with taxes! All the factories pay taxes and all the small traders pay. We provide the the financing resources and the city lives from it.*

□ Since I thought that Abakar's answers had far more to do with an ideal than with reality I continued asking:

□ *But if you don't pay it's better for you, no? You have more money for yourself no? This suggestion annoyed Abakar.*

-*No! It's not better! I am disadvantaged! It's not better! I cannot speak in front of power. In front of authorities! If you come, you want to trample me, you can do it. Who would defend me if I don't pay taxes? If I don't pay taxes can the state defend me? The state cannot help me. State cannot support you. It's not normal. If you have an enterprise you have to pay taxes. So that they look at your rights. There is an advantage of paying the taxes. It is very useful!*

-*Look, he continued after a while, I am in the so called informal sector. I want to be in the formal sector. In the informal sector you cannot get any subventions. I want to apply for subventions at the ministry for small and medium enterprises and at the ministey of agriculture, because I make agricultural products ,and at the ministry of tourism.because there is many tourists coming to Maroua. And I want to work with the National Employment Fund and get money to train 5-6 young people a year. In order to win the public market I have to do all these things. can not let it go, because I can have people in charge of paper work who would help me. I will change this being hidden. I want to go to offices and speak the way I want to speak. because I pay taxes. In order to improve the blacksmith profession, in order to make this profession acknowledged I have to pay taxes. I will pay before demanding! This is what they call democracy. That's my goal!"*

Paying taxes equalled buying an institutionalized cultural capital, in the form of a stamp and a status which allows you to enter fields that are closed to the most of craftsmen in the Far North who do not pay taxes. Such a status can be converted to economic capital (subventions), social

(meeting people who want to approach and invest in legal sector) and symbolic capital.

I couldn't however escape the feeling that his wish to pay taxes could undermine the dignity of other blacksmiths who work with him at the market and create a lot of divisions. If Abakar would pay but other wouldn't, he would be legal, and others would suddenly become illegal. He could get subventions but other could not. His workshop would produce objects in big quantities, he could drop prices even further . It would be the same as with bringing electricity and installing welding stations. To take a step into legal economy would unbalance the power relations at the market. I asked him if other blacksmiths know about his plans and what they think about it?

Some of them can't accept it. When I say I need 15 million CFA (180.000NOK) to create a big enterprise they just do not believe me. But some of them approach me to ask about what am I doing

-But if you succeed would you relation with other blacksmiths change?

-If I succeed they will say "I have to do like Abakar, to earn more. !!!" When I installed this wheel in my workshop, instead of the bellows, everyone was laughing. Oh he did not inherit the profession, that's why he starts with innovations. Look around now, a lot of them work with the wheel. With the association it was the same. Some of them were against creating it. Now they are happy. When I created one, suddenly more of them created their own associations. Now there are four at the market. So with the enterprise, I am sure that it would be exactly the same When they will see me paying taxes they will do the same. They will follow me. Because they are scared now. Something like enterprise exceeds their imagination! They don't have information that I have ..It is a bit like having children who go to primary school and putting them together with people from university. You cannot do it..And besides if they wouldn't have enough work themselves they would need work. They can always come to work in my enterprise. They will get work here!!!"

12. THE IMPROVED COOKER

Nothing better displayed the difference between Abakar and other blacksmiths than his “*improved electric cooker on wood and charcoal*”. It was the only object sold at the iron market running on electricity – a symbol of change under way one could say.

The outer case of the machine was made from old car bodies. Abakar shaped the scrap iron with hammer using previously prepared templates and cut the form with big blacksmiths scissors. The electricity activated a small windmill originally used in refrigerators to blow the air to the front of the machine where charcoal was burning in the clay pots. Turning the machine off cut the air supply and the charcoal ceased to burn.

The cooker had many advantages. It was small, and light enough to be easily transported from place to place. It could work with both electricity (using charcoal) and without electricity (using wood), an important feature in a region not adapted to use gas. It used a particular kind of charcoal that burned a lot slower than the commonly used charcoal.

Abakar's invention caught the attention of many clients and tourists that frequented the market. They stopped and stared at the unusual shape of Abakar's invention. The questions followed:

- *What's that???*

- *So all this from this cars?*

- *And how much?*

- *And how do you use that?* Abakar explained, and if people shook their heads in admiration he shouted to his younger brother, *Nasir, bring the photos* and the ritual went on “*Here I won, here the second, here the third and sometimes, here the governor, here the president..*”

The photo rituals were a way of making a name for himself. The cooker was supposed to open the gates to better future, for him and his family. Abakar hoped to receive a patent. and once he would have the exclusive right to sell it he would find someone willing to invest in the infrastructure necessary to produce it in large quantities. By acquiring machines, expanding the workshop, and hiring additional staff he could start producing the cookers in large quantities and share the profits with the investors. But the way there was long. Abakar made the request about the patent – the exclusive right to his intellectual property-in the local branch of Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises and waited.



Pic.10 Abakar working on his improved cooker.



Pic. 11 During the contest for the Best Scientific Invention in the Far North.

He has already sold around 100 cookers for the promotional price of 25 000 CFA (300NOK) each. However, given 15 000 CFA invested in its production, two days of work, the innovativeness of the object, the positive feedback he got from his clients and above all the fact that he was the only one selling such cookers the profit of 10 000 CFA (120NOK) he made was small. Abakar thought like a businessman. Dropping the price at the beginning as a way of promoting it and winning the market:

Once 200 cookers will be in use in town I will raise the price. I sell 100 cookers more and raise the price by 5 000 CFA. I will sell it for 30 000 CFA. I have to wait first with the price so that people get to know it before I start raising the price. But you know, people I met told me that the price is too low. They said that even “white people” could not have done such things below 50 000 CFA.”

One day when he sat in front of his workshop working on the next exemplar of the cooker I asked him how other blacksmith at the market perceive his invention. Abakar once more proved not to care too much about modesty:

They see it and. well hmmm... they just ask themselves how is that possible?.. They just see clients coming, asking for it and they send them to me They don't know how to do it and I cannot tell them. I have to make a lot of money myself before I tell anyone. Other blacksmiths look at it as some kind of miracle”

During my stay in Maroua Abakar displayed his cooker at the competition for the *Best Scientific Research Invention in the Far North Region*. The competition was hosted by the local Chamber of Commerce and the winners were supposed to take part in the national contest with the same name in the capital city Yaoundé the following year. The contest was judged by the Regional Minister of Scientific Research who headed a larger jury made up of various officials.

Abakar wasn't alone in his struggle to *make it* by turning his invention into a success. His cooker competed, among others, against a self-made genealogical iron chair for local hospitals, an iron bicycle to crush seeds into powder and many other objects whose names and exact functions I did not have time to decipher. The “importance” of the event was highlighted by the presence of a cameraman from the local branch of Cameroonian TV. Abakar gave an interview about the cooker and triggered attention of other participants as he was being filmed by two cameras at the same time.

Walking around the room with evaluation sheets in their hand, the jury asked questions and gave points, displaying at the same time their privileged position over the participants. The hierarchical gap between the members of the jury and the participants was visible by the way the jury were dressed and by the tone in which they often asked their questions. After an hour of

waiting for the jury who left the exhibition “*to discuss the verdict*” Abakar got to know that he was among the six craftsmen who were allowed to participate in the national contest the following year. Additionally he received a price of 20 000 CFA.

Promoting the cooker brought him beyond the iron market, beyond the field where his habitus swims like “fish in the water” and confronts him with the new arenas. Meeting officials and receiving institutionalised cultural capital in the form of diplomas is a twofold way of improving his confidence on formal arenas. Firstly, his confidence increases by having more experience in dealing with authorities, and secondly it increases because his embodied cultural capital in the forms of skills is institutionalised in forms diplomas. It is even considered to be scientific - a paradox considering Abakar’s short encounter with institutionalised science. *Impossible in nothing!*

13. TRAVELLING TO THE UNKNOWN

- Here are the letters send by the minister that we have received from Yaounde and here are the letters from the Federal Government of Nigeria.

- Yes, Yes Abakar nodded.

We were sitting in the office of the Regional minister of Small and Medium Enterprises. The meeting concerned the 5th African Artisanal Exhibition in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria. Abakar was among the craftsmen chosen to represent Cameroon. The minister explained the content of the letters that he would have to carry with him while travelling. Abakar was quiet and listened without asking any questions.

- So, this letter is from General Custom Officer because if you import the products they might stop you and you won't enter unless you pay the customs duty. So the Minister of Tourism and Culture wrote to the General Custom Officer in Nigeria that all the Cameroonian artisans who are on the list can enter. We still don't have the exact dates. It seems that they will postpone the exhibition by one week. Once I will have all the documents I will call you to collect all the official documents.

- Thank You my Delegate! Thank You my Delegate!

It was the first time that Abakar was going so far away from his home town. He had been in Nigeria twice before but only in Maiduguri, the north-western part of the country, near the border to Cameroon. Maiduguri was familiar to Abakar. He could communicate at least with some of the population in Fulfulde and, being of Kanuri origins on his father's side, was perceived as a local. Abuja, the capital city to more than 160 million of Nigerians was a new challenge for Abakar.

I want to go. I will take photos and few products and try to make a name for my enterprise. If it would be for the sake of selling the products than I am not capable of selling outside the country, even outside of the region. But my objective is to see what other craftsmen do over there and to come back and make it here. Voila! That's my goal! So I really want to go

To travel to other places means to see the alternatives. Blacksmiths from the iron market in Maroua were not mobile. They worked everyday and could not leave their work without falling into financial difficulties. The only thing which could keep them them from working was a serious sickness or marriage. Abakar had managed – at least partially- to escape the viscous circle of working from 7a.m. to 6.pm. Travelling became an important component of his innovativeness.

This is what gives me spirit to innovate. Thanks to travelling I already innovated many things and besides even if find out that something has already been invented over there, I can still

come here and make the same thing here. This is why I like travelling. If I wouldn't travel like the other artisans do I wouldn't be able to do anything.

Before his departure he was faced with a number of problems which gave a remarkable insight into the problems deriving of lack of different kinds of capital. Despite representing his country he had to organize and finance the trip himself. He lacked the information about the transportation and did not know the exact day of departure. He did not know with whom was he going and where was he going to sleep once in Nigeria. He did not speak any English. In short he was in permanent state of uncertainty all the time dependent on other's people. Additionally he lacked the money to finance his journey because two clients who were supposed to pay for the products they ordered did not come to pick them up. The issues directly connected to to the trip were accompanied by smaller everyday problems.

It all started on a very hot and busy day. The procession of singing children marched in front of the workshops. People dressed in Boubous with names of various political parties were seen all over the city. Flags where covering the main street. The 17th of May, the National Day of Cameroon was approaching. The year before Abakar had headed the members of his association dressed in GIC ADAAM T-Shirts in the workers march. This year he had to work and planned to stay in his workshop. He was late and the deadline was approaching. Apart from working on usual orders he fought with time to prepare an additional two cookers for display in Abuja and five wheelbarrows to ensure that there would be enough products to sell and support his family while he was away. Simply said, going away did not dismiss him from his duties and responsibilities towards his family and since nearly everything he did was on credit each journey was a “financial shock.

While overwhelmed with work a truck used to organize the event crashed into electricity pot which supplied Abakar`s workshop with the electricity. It was first of many troubles which were to come before he could leave for the exhibition to Abuja. There was no time to waste and waiting for the state company to fix the problem would take ages:

I have to pay the private company from my own pocket. I have a lot of work. Three wheelbarrows. 15.000 CFA (200NOK) to invest in each of them and than this money for the transport of the products which is still missing. If I don't finish than what?

Once the electricity problem was fixed he could move on with working on the orders. It did not take long till he was distracted by another event. He was cutting out the form of the cooker when his phone rang..

- OK OK Of course. I will be right there. he answered

- *The Governor of Maroua is making the tour of the city and he will come to the Chamber of Commerce to meet with the craftsmen. I will be back in an hour.*

What was supposed to take an hour took the whole day. Due to the electricity blackout in another part of the city the whole delegation was stuck for hours. All the craftsmen waited for six hours until the dark limousines arrived at the Chamber of Commerce. Craftsmen stood in line in front of the entrance, to greet the governor in what was the next remarkable display of symbolic violence:

Thank You for Your patience. Thank You for Your patience“, the governor repeated as he shook the hands of each craftsman. The governor gave a speech about the importance of craftsman for Maroua and the Far North region and of the important role of the Chamber of Commerce. He assured that there are many people around with money who are eager to buy and sell the artisanal products and that craftsmen and the Chamber of Commerce have an important role to play on the local arena.

On the one hand, Abakar lost an entire day of work, but on the other it was an investment in all kinds of capital, cultural, social and symbolic that can bring fruits in the future. Every chance of presence among local leaders is a must for an aspiring entrepreneur. The day after the meeting with the governor the photographer who attended the event came to the market to give Abakar a new photo, another one to his big collection. *These are officials one should go to hear what they have to say. To respect them. It is important.*

As the departure approached, troubles accumulated. Clients still refused to pick up their products and the Regional Minister did not contact him about the official letters he needed to attend the exhibition. Finally the school director owing him money arrived, however without the whole amount and not willing to buy all products that he ordered. Abakar was disappointed and had a longer argument with the director:

-If I knew that you don't have money, I wouldn't work on your order. With so little time before my departure I 've left aside my own work. You see.. pointing to five wheelbarrows all half done standing in front of his market. I didn't finish my own work. I was focused on finishing your work. If they hadn't postponed the departure I was supposed to leave today. All my objects are already prepared and now I don't have money for transport It would be better if you give me the whole amount.

No, No. I can't. I've send the money to my child. answered the director.

I understand but you should also understand my situation. Haven't I told you that I need the

money for my journey.

This was it. Abakar was left with half of what he was counting for as the departure date was approaching. On that evening the only bulb at the blacksmith market in the only workshop connected to electricity was on, long after dusk. Abakar stayed to finish the two improved cookers he planned to take with him to Abuja.

I am stuck... You see, life is like this. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's bad. Life goes on. I have to accept it as it is. If my plan works out, if the enterprise works out I won't have such problems One day when I will become rich such things won't happen to me I wouldn't be bothered by small sums of money

All of Abakar's problems derived from the fact that his social, economic and cultural capital needed to organize a bigger journey and to fix unexpected problems was insufficient. He didn't have the money to transport his products, and he did not know people who could lend him the money or who would back him up in front of more powerful people. As a manual worker he had a low status. Had he had enough money (economic capital), clients owing him money, and electricity bill he had to pay wouldn't bother him too much.³⁴ Had he had more social and symbolic capital, a higher social status, than maybe people who owed him money (amongst those a school principal and a teacher), those who had to provide him with letters (the regional minister), who had to deliver electricity (a state owned company) would treat him with more respect.

Finally the Regional Minister called with the short message *You leave tomorrow.* We collected the necessary documents from the ministry and Abakar with help of Sureya prepared his suitcase. On the day of departure he woke up very early. He sacrificed a chicken “for good luck, so that he will bring the price back home”, put a grigri in his bag, “to ensure that nothing bad will happen on the way, and off he went into unknown.

Abakar spent two weeks in Abuja exposing his cooker, plough and wheelbarrow. And the sacrifice brought luck. There were no prizes issued to individuals, but the Cameroonian delegation consisting of 10 artisans from all over the country won first place for the best stand at the exhibition.

³⁴ I did give him the lacking sum of money for the trip.



Pic. 12 Abakar in front of his stand in Abuja.

On the evening of his return Abakar's family gathered to hear stories and receive small presents that Abakar had brought with him. The photos were a proof that Abakar once more had "made it". As the only blacksmith representing Cameroon he made a name for the local craftsmen in Maroua. He was proud and his family was proud of him. He was their window to the world.

Abakar also brought a present for himself, a plastic bucket that could heat water. Abakar hoped to turn this water heater into his next success. *I bought it to make the same one from iron. Otherwise I couldn't discover how it works. One goes away exactly to discover such things. Do you think we could make money if I make the same bucket from iron?* He asked his vendor.

Travelling made him aware of the "gap" between local craftsmen and the state employees. Since the government did not provide the Cameroonian delegation with money for a place to stay while they were in Nigeria Abakar ended up sleeping on a mattress at the exhibition centre. He had to finance everything himself and his initial assumptions about Nigeria as a cheap country proved to be mistaken. Used to the cheap commodities that were brought to Cameroon from the nearby markets of north-western Nigeria Abakar was surprised by the high prices in Abuja. *you can not find a place to sleep for less than 20 000 CFA. Abuja is not the capital of poverty. If you are poor*

than they will ask you why did you come here at all?, he told his vendor after he had returned to Maroua. *The officials fly with planes and we craftsmen won't even get anything for the cheapest transport. But the minister was happy. Maybe next time they will pay*, he said.

After returning to the market, Abakar did not work for a few days. Seeing a world full of other options, and meeting new people, motivated him and, seeing new things, made him wish for more.

- I have to think first. There is so many things to do! But money is missing. He told me sitting in front of his workshop:

There will be a new contest in Nigeria, they invited me. No No, wait Niger. It's in Niger. And than there is one in Burkina. They told me they will help me with the passport. And a lot of people asked me about my e-mail. I need an e-mail and a digital camera to make photos of what I see at the exhibitions“

The problem with new technologies however was, that it was not enough just to acquire it. One has to master it's functions.

14. TECHNOLOGICAL DRAMAS

We get off the motorbike at the noisy street that crosses the city centre and entered through the sun-protecting glass door into the office of *Societe pour le Development*, a newly established NGO. Waiting for us were two young enthusiastic workers eager to link the new entrepreneurs like Abakar with potential clients and investors. Abakar brought his photos and spoke about his plans and recent successes including his trip to Abuja. Our hosts shook their heads and were genuinely interested in his plans. But their main message was simple and was delivered in one single sentence:

All your ingenious ideas don't matter. if you don't have the proper tools. You cannot do everything manually. This wont work.

Of course, Of course. I know.. Abakar nodded.

But this is why we are here. So, listen what we will do. We will go to big cities like Douala or Yaoundé where the workshops are well equipped and buy used machines that aren't in use any more. They don't need them over there and we will still use them here and it will all get a lot cheaper! Because all the agricultural tools that you do at the market are interesting to us. We have projects running in the villages all over Far North, so we could find clients for the tools. If we cooperate you would know ahead which objects to make, how much and so on... we could find material...so there is plenty of things we could do together. Our host were really optimistic and I felt that this might be a chance for Abakar.

Getting help in acquiring machines and especially getting clients and safe orders in bigger quantities seemed like a big opportunity for Abakar. With the number of blacksmiths working at the market, the place had a potential to become a huge factory of agricultural tools for all the neighbouring villages which lived from agriculture. Blacksmiths had skills, experience, knowledge of the region, they could appropriate the tools to the individual wishes. If they could only get help in creating a suitable environment the local agricultural market could be entirely supplied by the local craftsmen. But there was no electricity, no machines, no material.

Suddenly the conversation moved onto another level...*Now the next thing.* Our host said. *Until now I don't know if you have the training in informatics?*

No Abakar answered quietly. *You see we should start with this. You will receive the training in informatics which suits your work as a blacksmiths. We could train you in computer design. This way you won't start by cutting iron with hand but you design the shape on the computer.*

While the first part of the conversation - acquiring few machines, scanning the market and

using Abakar as a producer of agricultural tools for the development projects in the region seemed to be feasible I had doubts about computer designs. But our host continued with enthusiasm:

Look here a web cam (pointing to the small camera on his laptop and than pointing at me filming the whole event) he can go back to Poland..he will meet another blacksmiths over there and you can work like this together..he does..you do..he does..you do..you decide about measurements together with help of internet through the web cam.

The potentials of computer programmes, web-cams and internet that were mentioned by our host made sense but I somehow did not share his enthusiasm. I thought about two older blacksmiths working next to Abakar's workshop who were blasting the bellows from dusk till dawn about children tapping hammers some of whom did not go to school. They were so far away from turning on the computer, not to speak from designing something on the computer. Besides no matter how hard I try up there in Poland or any other country in Europe the chances of finding a blacksmith who would develop ideas with Abakar using a web cam were rather small. In fact I have never met a blacksmith in my country. Blacksmiths simply do not make ploughs. Machines make ploughs. The post industrial world has been in the era of machines and assembly lines for a long time, blacksmiths are stuck in an era of bricolage that is unknown in technologically more developed parts of the world.³⁵

Abakar left the office of *Societe* after having been promised a photo exhibition of his objects in their office and an extra courses in the use of computers, both as soon as they would finish with moving in and installing all the facilities in their office which was to take few more weeks. In the meantime I helped him to open an e-mail account and I tried to teach him the basics of using the internet in the local internet cafe.

Coming to the cyber-café he experience what Bourdieu called hysteresis, the mismatch between his *habitus* and the field on which he meets students, white tourists and few middle class people. Reading and writing in French became an additional obstacle in learning computers. He did not shy away from the challenges. It seemed to me that exactly because computers and the internet were so unknown to Abakar, he ascribed nearly magical power to them, believing that once he would master the knowledge of computers and World Wide Web the road to success would be open. The internet which, unlike any other medium contributed to the democratization of knowledge

³⁵ The immense technological gap in producing agricultural tools may be seen online. The Norwegian factory Kvernaland is the biggest producers io ploughs in the world.: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_LV-Wz5NYc

might open new possibilities. Online platforms like Youtube are full of “do it yourself” tutorials, which for a bricoleur like Abakar could become an inspiration for developing new ideas and creating innovative objects. Internet could also offer him the possibility to stay in contact with other people and send photos of his products. Abakar already planned to get a laptop and thought about future:

Once I will have an e-mail everyone will be able to enter my e-mail and see all the objects that I produce!!!

No, no Abakar. That's a web-site. An e-mail is your personal thing. Only you should be able to open it. You use your e-mail to communicate with others and you would be able to send the photos to whomever you wish.

Aahh it's not the same..

Abakar did not know. He did not grow up in the environment where e-mails and web cams were of any importance and is not easy to smoothly upgrade from hammers and bellows to e-mails and webcams coming from the blacksmith market...

15. ON THE FOREIGN GROUNDS OF BUREAUCRACY

Things were moving forward for Abakar. After visiting the Societe he was invited to the headquarters of the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises – the very same place where he collected all the necessary documents for his journey to Abuja.

This time, instead of turning left to the office of the Regional Minister we made a right and were welcomed in another office by the *Head of the Department of Local Crafts in Informal Sector*, wearing a casual black suit and pink tie, clothes that symbolized the foreign grounds that Abakar was entering - the grounds of bureaucracy. Abakar knew our host and after short informal talk which gave me time to prepare the camera he announced the news:

So now, since you came back I have a message. We can start the process of protecting the cooker. If it goes well, no matter where one goes in the world one will know that it is you, Abakar Adamou who fabricated that thing, Here is the form to fill out. You have to bring back and we will process the request to the Minister in Yaounde..

Yes, Yes. Abakar listened and shook head.

I was witness to how Abakar was entering the world of socially acclaimed knowledge reinforced with a stamp! His ideas could soon start to pay off. Since the bigger money lies in ideas, and in the exclusive right to own and use those ideas a patent could be ground breaking.

Owning the right to the intellectual property would be an important asset to find investors who would give him money to modernize his workshop, buy machines and enable the faster and easier production of cooker and other tools. Such investments could potentially come from different sources: from government subventions that Abakar would become eligible for once entering the formal sector with his enterprise, from NGO's interested in cooperation with local entrepreneurs who could organize people around themselves and foster local development, or from private people interested in pure profit, who would take the risk, get credit to produce the cookers and other objects in huge quantities. A patent was a pure example of institutional capital with high probability of conversion into economic capital. He was given all the necessary forms that he had to fill out before starting a longer process that he only vaguely understood.

And there is one more thing Abakar the civil servant said from behind the laptop

Your products will be displayed in the Catalogue of the Best Craftsmen in Cameroon. So I need five photographs of your best objects and a CV. Do you know what a CV is?

I know, I know. Abakar nodded

OK, so you have to take five photos and send them per e-mail together with your CV. Here is my address.”

Yes, Yes

By that time Abakar already had an e-mail. And he also had quite an impressive CV, full of contested, exhibitions, seminars, 1st, 2nd and 3rd places. I had a small digital camera with me so that we could make a photos. The problem was however the form that he had to fill out.

I recall the image of Abakar on the day when he was informed about the possibility of patenting the cooker. He was happy but he was also puzzled about the sophisticated form full of legal terms that he was supposed to fill out. Abakar was a bricoleur and papers were definitely not his world. The expression of his face changed when he tried to read the form. He was sitting in front of his workshop, his lips moved slowly as he was trying to decipher the meaning of the documents he had received at the office. His difficulties faced in internet cafe, when he had to read the webpages. He could read but only a bit and he could write but also just a bit. Both of these skills did not come with ease. Reading took him an incredible amount of time and he did not know any spelling in French. He could not fulfil simplest tasks like filling the form in French. Abakar was aware that he would have to rely on other people's expertise if he wants to establish himself in the legal economy. To be able to read and write, to know the basics of internet, are skills taken for granted in the bureaucratic world: but these skills are actually expert systems for people like Abakar. Expert systems demand blind trust and to trust blindly is to be vulnerable. Abakar was lucky to get help but also vulnerable as he himself had to rely on the mercy of others peoples knowledge. Whatever appeared on the horizon, be it a form to fill out, an e-mail to open, he needed help.

This time the help came soon and unexpected. The director of the Artisanal Museum in Maroua; where Abakar's products were displayed as examples of local blacksmiths craft: appeared at Abakar's workshop. The middle aged women whom Abakar knew very well went through the whole form that he had collected from the ministry, translated each sentence into Fulfulde in more informal manner and explained it in detail.

Do you know that if you don't protect your invention it won't have any innovative value? So, you see now if they protect your invention and if you see the same object somewhere else you may sew the person. One protects it to prevent other people from coping it. Otherwise it's not your invention any more.

- „Yes, Yes Ok, Ok“ Abakar nodded, nodded and nodded, occasionally raising his head distracted by the chaos at the market.

- *The next point: What would be the impact of your invention on the development of Cameroon? Right. That is very important. In your case, you can write here that with this product you fight against desertification. That's what we want. We don't need things which consume. It saves the wood. We don't want inventions which affect women negatively. Women don't suffer and such things..*

- *Of course, of course*

- *That's simply what they ask you for. Just fill it out. You understand the rest, no?*

- *Yes Yes*

- *So just fill it out!!!*

Easier said than done, I thought. I knew that someone else would have to fill it out. “Woe betide the man who knows no one, either directly or indirectly, goesoes an old African saying³⁶ Abakar could only hope that his children would do better.

³⁶Olivier de Sardan 1999:41

16. CHILDREN - THE NEXT GENERATION OF BLACKSMITHS

“Hey! I am talking to you! So you came to work or not? Because it's less than a week since you have started with your brother and you already stop coming. If it continues like that it won't work with me. It's not how one works; , won't you answer or what?”

Abakar was serious. Pointing his finger at Moutar one of his apprentices whose eyes were now trying to avoid the serious look of his teacher.

Finally eyes downcast and barely audible he tried to explain himself:

-”Mama told me to start school. But my brother will come to the workshop.

-”What?!!!” Abakar wasn't satisfied with the answer.

-”Is there any school today? Heeh? Do you have school today?!!!!

-” No”

-” So, these are all lies!!! And besides, what do you mean with restart the school. I did not know that you stopped going to school in the first place. So you enjoy running around heh? Run around instead to learn the work heh? But it's your problem. It is up to you. Either you come here and learn or you do whatever you do. But if I count two days that you do not show up your foot will never step here again Understood.?!!”

There was no answer, only a downcast face and eyes avoiding straying the teacher. Abakar had not finished yet.

“You think that I play with children here. Heh? If I had I wouldn't have so many apprentices here...You have to be here everyday early in the morning..To come today but don't come tomorrow won't work with me. Ah and concerning your school. From now on, you will bring all your school stuff here and I will enrol you in that school – pointing at the building just in front of the workshop where Moumini, his adoptive son, attended.

Understood! So you better ..” Abakar wanted to continue but luckily for Moutar, someone greeted him from the distance and he raised himself from the chair casting short *Beware!* and off he went to talk to his acquaintance.

Moutar was 11. He wanted to ride the bike and play with his friends. .He didn't like sitting at the market..and clearly did not see the connection between learning skills and better possibilities for the future. His mother- an aunt of Abakar's - brought him and his 13 year old brother Fadil to Abakar's workshop, so that boys could learn some skills which could back them up in the uncertain future of northern Cameroon. Many parents actually wished for their children that someone would invest a bit of time in learning the something. The street did not bring anything, the market provided the attention of older people, it gave a warm meal and it gave skills which could always be an

alternative.

Boys usually practised by making the spoons from smallest pieces of iron. This work was a first step in tinsmithing. It demanded dexterity and feel for the material. Once finished with the spoons boys queued in front of Abakar to show him their work and get his approval. Abakar was often harsh, looking seriously at every smallest detail, demanding them to correct the spoon, occasionally even breaking the spoons altogether before he finally approved their work with the usual: *It's ok Bring it to Ali*, and letting the boys run with their spoons to the vendor who would sell them for 100 CFA (1 NOK) to women preparing deep fried doughnuts, the most popular breakfast in town. In return the boys would get money for food and get some additional pocket money which for most of the time, they ended up spending the very same day. Dealing with apprentices Abakar played his role of a serious teacher to achieve a desired effect-their attention and respect for work and skills. The mask he put up was an exact opposite to the humble, polite mask he put up in front of officials and politicians.(Goffman 1971)

Letting them just play around like this is not good I learn them that the first thing is the profession. The skills. One has to learn to love the manual skills. That is what I believe in. If in the future they would like to travel and go to the university, that's even better for them. But after teaching them here at the market I would be sure that they would not run around in future and ask people to give them this or that”

The time they spend at the market shows how the field-in this case the market shapes the habitus of young children. Skills, especially in small scale societies were acquired through a long process of acculturation, they were by-products of growing up together and learning from older members of society. As the body of young children develops the skills literally grow up in until they become embodied. Learning the techniques is learning the entire environment in which the process of learning takes place. It is learning the norms, values and patterns characteristic of the blacksmith market as well as feeling for all tools and techniques . The time at the market shapes their habitus and the skills become the embodied cultural capital for the future. (Ingold 2001 22-30)

But the is changing. Since the skills learnt at the blacksmiths market have rather little potential to be converted into economic and symbolic capital, devoting children's time only to the market means a risky investment for the insecure future in the changing world around. A lot of children will leave the market in search of new means of supporting families, the same way that Abakar did some 20 years ago. Their entry capital wherever they go would not be high. Blacksmith

are just craftsmen because they are working with and not with hands. (Ingold 2001) It would be naive to think that school and education will immediately turn into work, success and money. School education becomes a nearly indispensable additional capital to get the cheapest ticket on the train called global modernity. Without this ticket it would be harder.

Abakar had a plan to expand his teaching and apply for state funding to train young people in his modernized workshop. ³⁷ But he also understood well that the market is not enough and that in order to succeed one has to be flexible and to leave the workshop and to devote the time to different activities. The earlier the better. On his own example he learned how much he profited from the fact that his skills went beyond those of the ordinary blacksmithing. He encouraged his 19 year old brother to continue with a technical school in Maroua to learn things which he would not have a chance to learn at the workshop.

When it comes to manual skills Nasir has no problem over there at school. He know all those things they teach them. You see, he knows tinsmithing and he knows welding. If he soon learns blacksmithing he will have 3 professions. But what he needs is reading and writing. If he additionally knows how to read and write and to express himself well in French than he will have a chance. And what's more, if he also can make use of internet he can be successful. Like this he will have all the necessary tools to innovate and to win prizes maybe to travel outside of Cameroon.

You see me how I suffer. I didn't go to school. So it's difficult for me. This is why now, I have to recruit people who had some form of education so that the enterprise works well. I know that I will do the beginning but it will be my children who would improve it. I didn't inscribe them to school to become state employees. They go to school to take over the enterprise that I want to create for them. It's their future. When I die, I'll leave it to them. They'll manage it well. Voila! That's my goal!!!"

³⁷ This plan was perfectly in line with the recommendations of the World Bank concerning apprenticeships in Cameroon and had big chances of success. The World Bank Report on Cameroon's informal sector from January states that *young people seeking apprenticeships face a problem because there is no formal structure for certifying the knowledge they acquire. Yet this type of on-the-job training has a huge potential to equip them with practical skills needed for a particular profession. According to the report, this problem particularly affects young people from northern Cameroon, where apprenticeships are widespread.*

17. CONCLUSION

On December 5, 2012 the Wall Street Journal informed its readers that the Indian corporation Jindal Steel will invest 500 million dollars to build an iron ore processing factory in the coastal town of Kribi, located 300 kilometres south of the Cameroonian capital Yaoundé.³⁸ Jindal Steel will thus join the Australian Sundance company which owns 90% of of stake at Cam Iron. As the ancient business of blacksmiths - processing of iron ore - became the business of transnational corporations the repetitive clangs of hammers at the blacksmiths market in Maroua go on.

Globalization rather than good or bad is a process which leaves different marks in different social settings. Because of the unequal distribution of power scientific and technological innovations help only the few and in many cases just reproduce inequalities and expand the gap between the rich and the poor. On the core of all the problems is exclusion of people like Abakar, beginning entrepreneurs who could make a change in the local settings, give jobs to others and create something for the future.

The fundamental question however is not how one includes Abakar but rather if the rules of world system actually make it possible to include people like Abakar.

Maybe the painful answer lies in his own words. While working on his improved cooker I asked Abakar about the reaction of other blacksmiths to his invention. His answer was straight, simple, honest and one could even say selfish and unethical:

I can not tell them how to do it! Only I know how to do it! First I have to make enough money myself!..he answered.

But aren't these words the cornerstone of entrepreneurship, of capitalism, of expert systems. They seem like a truism. Like a must to succeed. And aren't his words exactly the same words which leave Africa and people like Abakar behind.

First we and than the rest. Knowledge and expertise has always been power. Blacksmith had been powerfull. Now knowledge and expertise is power on the global scale. There would be no inequalities without expertise, without of scarceness of resources, without people who define what actually constitutes the desired privileged resources. Before was an era of blacksmith experts, now is an era of IT experts, financial experts, medical experts. And many other experts. We live in the world of transnational corporations and nation states competing over power and profits.

One could paraphrase Abakar's expression and it could be the words an average CEO,

³⁸ <http://blogs.wsj.com/dealjournalindia/2012/12/05/jindal-steel-to-invest-in-cameroon/>

banker or politician and it will apply everywhere to the issue of Africa in the global world... *We can not tell them how to do it!.. Only we know how to do it!...First we have to make enough money ourself!!!*

But these words ironically came from a person who himself is underprivileged. A simple beginner entrepreneur lacking resources to establish himself on the formal economy follow the same philosophy as the most powerful people in the world – focus on expertise in search of profit. Same on the bottom as on the top.

Reproduction of inequalities rather than something new became just more global, the characteristic feature of the global world-system. Africa is often referred to as the continent of the future; as the continent that had learnt to wait. Technological and scientific innovation will not stop. They would only accelerate. And this way, even if Africa makes a step the world will make two. As long as the ideas of progress, profit and national interests will be given priority the inequalities will be reproduced and the natural catastrophes would remain the only truly global thing.

And concerning Abakar. Abakar told me once that he cannot wait for others to help him. That he has to make it alone. The right attitude. And I am sure that he will make it. Maybe not alone and maybe not only with Gods help but with the help of a few more people who would give him a helping hand out there, on the foreign grounds of bureaucracy. Hopefully, once he establishes his enterprise, starts to pay taxes, hires more people and makes enough money for himself he will tell others how to do it! Give a chance to others so that they follow him in building an African middle class. In the end this is what they call democracy. And that's his goal!

EPILOGUE

The world does not stop for a second. Especially in places undergoing rush transformation, such as Maroua, each day brings something new. After my fieldwork I stayed in telephone contact with Abakar. We even exchanged short e-mails occasionally. Abakar sent them from the cyber cafes in Maroua. Towards the end of the writing process new changes took place and new possibilities appeared.

Two new workshops installed electricity and will most probably install welding stations soon.

The new city council is planned to be built in the close proximity of the blacksmith market which might result in moving the workshops to another location. As a result Abakar does not plan to build his enterprise on the iron market any more but in the place in which he has prepared to build a house. As he said, the rumours are that it's a good place because the Chinese bought the ground to build some factories.

Abakar did not succeed to go neither to Niger nor to Burkina, because of lack of money.

The Society for Development which was supposed to help Abakar with finding clients, machines and teach him in the basics of computers closed down a few months after our meeting.

The Italian NGO *Incontro fra i popoli* that invested in electricity in Abakar's workshop proposed to invest once more in the modernization of his workshop. This time the sum is supposed to be much bigger.

“Ta wa ina”, Fulfulde for “let the wood not get finished” is the official name given to Abakar's improved cooker by the patent office.

ISDERA a big program financed by the European Commission entered Maroua with the project entitled: “Innovative service in difficult environment for recycler artisan”³⁹

Sureya gave birth to a boy. His name is Amadou. Amadou *se porte bien!* And who knows maybe in the future he will take over his fathers enterprise.

And as this thesis goes to print the laptop it was written on will be sent to Maroua to help Abakar make the promised first steps in learning computers.

³⁹ http://www.recyclageartisanal.eu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=56&lang=en

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