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## **‘Up as a Rabbit, Down as a Lion’: Socio-economic Determinants of New Idioms of Power – Visual Case Stories from Urban Adamaoua, Cameroon**

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### **Abstract**

In the 1990s, I felt empathy with the Sultan of Adamaoua. I do feel empathy with one of the richest and most influential industrialists in Cameroon today - emotions which are difficult to convey in today's Norway. Ideas about Africa, about poverty, corruption, etc. make such feelings politically incorrect. My anthropological research is supposed to lead to positive consequences for the people with whom I work. They be 'small' or 'big' people. This is called applied research. My research experience has made me conclude the following: Research should contribute to giving people new voices in new arenas; make them visible in new social spheres. I wish for instance, that my research may promote authorities' listening more to and seeing people who are poor or who are uneducated, and, that their decisions may reach them, empower them. Often, also, one thinks that empowerment only concerns people without power. Since I have for long worked with people with big power, my research should enable their voices to become strengthened and make them visible on the new social arenas that are under pressure from their own behaviour and entrepreneurship, but that they themselves do not see. What criteria do we use when we decide whether our research should empower people in power? It is important that we include the 'small' as well as the 'big' in our applied research. Otherwise, democracy can not be promoted.

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### Résumé

Dans les années 1990, j'éprouvais de l'empathie pour le Sultan d'Adamaoua. J'éprouve aussi de l'empathie pour l'un des industriels les plus riches et les plus influents au Cameroun aujourd'hui; des émotions qu'il est difficile d'exprimer en Norvège aujourd'hui. Les idées sur l'Afrique, la pauvreté, la corruption, etc. rendent de tels sentiments politiquement incorrects. Ma recherche anthropologique est censée conduire à des conséquences positives pour les personnes avec qui je travaille. Qu'elles soient de « petites » ou de « grandes » gens. C'est ce qu'on appelle la recherche appliquée. Mon expérience de recherche m'a fait tirer les conclusions suivantes: la recherche devrait contribuer à donner aux gens de nouvelles voix dans de nouveaux domaines; les rendre visibles dans de nouvelles sphères sociales. Je souhaite par exemple, que mes recherches puissent pousser les autorités à écouter et se soucier des gens pauvres ou non instruites, et que leurs décisions puissent les atteindre, les rendre autonomes. Souvent aussi, on pense que l'autonomisation ne concerne que les personnes sans pouvoir. Puisque j'ai longtemps travaillé avec des gens ayant un grand pouvoir, mes recherches doivent permettre à leurs voix de se fortifier et les rendre visibles sur les nouvelles arènes sociales qui sont sous la pression de leur propre comportement et leur esprit d'entreprise, mais qu'eux-mêmes ne voient pas. Quels critères utilisons-nous lorsque nous décidons si notre recherche devrait renforcer les gens au pouvoir? Il est important d'inclure les « petits », ainsi que les « grands » dans notre recherche appliquée. Sinon, la démocratie ne peut pas être promue.

### Introduction

Throughout many years of applied anthropological research in Christian and Muslim milieus in Ngaoundéré, Northern Cameroon, I have studied expressions of masculinity and femininity in public and domestic domains. I have progressively developed various tentative hypotheses about transformation processes and dominant dynamics of social change.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, I want to focus on visual idioms of masculinity and political power in Muslim urban settings. My argument is that richness (i.e., economic dynamics) overrides the current processes aiming at legitimizing democratic political power.

I have always used photographs and film as my research tool. Our images allow us, my Cameroonian partners in the field and me, to identify changes in how men have tried and now try to convey, nonverbally, legitimacy of new forms of masculinity and power.

The Norwegian proverb 'op som en løve; ned som en skindfelg' (literally 'up as a lion – down as a piece of skin'), expresses how persons experiencing success in the public arenas may quickly see their success and ambitions destroyed by unforeseen events. In the title of this paper, I have turned this proverb upside-down in order to express how difficult it is for people to

cope with processes of globalization and understand the currently changing rules shared by everybody that differentiate and legitimize behaviour in and access to social spheres. The constituents of spheres are arenas. They may be open like. The Western concept 'public' or domestic, or intimate domains<sup>2</sup> in different social contexts. People are often confused about what symbolizes higher and lower positions in social hierarchies, and for some people, the construction of legitimacy becomes part and parcel of their daily 'job'. What is 'up' and what is 'down'?

Many Europeans acquire a higher rank when they come to work in Africa. There is a greater demand for their competence in there: 'You have to go to Africa if you want to build castles', a staffer from Paris working in Cameroon once said to me. 'In France they do not build castles like Versailles anymore'. Africans may lose dignity and rank when coming to Europe. A modern African industrialist visiting Paris wants to order a limousine by phone. At first the taxi firm is reluctant to accept the order. The industrialist has to repeat many times that he has all kinds of credit cards; that he will pay cash if they want: 'In Paris I am seen as a rabbit – at home I am a lion', he says!

In Paris a black person might not have access to the same public service as the whites. Or, maybe this is too easy an assumption? The 'border' that was felt and expressed in the taxi-ordering negotiation, though, may well have concerned the difference between people coming from France and people from a country outside France. Not until we have done further research will we know the relevance-rules that lay behind difficulties of getting a limousine in Paris in a supposed public sphere in France. What we see is that some dynamics create an idea of open access, of equality; other dynamics close, exclude people from access, and these dynamics meet in conditioning people's behaviour on social arenas.

From the background of what has been and is presently considered visible idioms of power in today's Europe, and through my personal involvement in their lives, I will look into and compare the practices of a former Muslim Sultan<sup>3</sup> and a modern Muslim industrialist in Northern Cameroon. Both personalities are considered representatives of Fulbe<sup>4</sup> societies. Both experience a serious loss of power in their own societies. Both make me feel empathy. Both succeed to assure power through new means. Both of them have to handle own multi-ethnic origin in their identity management in various local settings. They have to handle local, traditional idioms of masculinity, power and social space and – at the same time – adapt to idioms of power and compartmentalization of social space, i.e., new notions of open/domestic or intimate (public and private) domains. They both travel around in Cameroon. They both go to Europe and come back to Cameroon. Both look at Western and Asian television channels. New definitions of intimate/open spaces/arenas

are currently proposed by the Sultan as well as by the industrialist in the local Cameroonian setting. It is my hypothesis that both of them play with Western idioms in their efforts to construct a powerful image of self (Goffman 1959). But the ways in which they play are different, as are their successes and failures. Often, they do not succeed in incorporating the new definitions in their own and their audiences' already existing social repertoires.



Al Hajji Jawri



Lamiido Issa Maigari

I want to show that difference in access to money has a great implication for such success and for the development of the two personalities' careers; and for their influence in the current transformation of open spheres. I also want to show how the study of and empathy with people in power are necessary ingredients if one wants to understand societal transformation and globalization.

I want to take a closer look into the practices of my two personalities in what may be called open (non-intimate) arenas. I want to discover the interface of local and global dynamics, i.e., where the power of definitions of the games people play is located (Goffman 1959, Barth 1996, Grønhaug 1974 and 1978, Rudie 1994 and 2008, Bourdieu 1979). Then I have also said that my analysis concerns people's, women's and men's access to and power of definition in open spheres, and that it varies whether local or global dynamics and rules are activated.

### **Time, Space, Practice and Experience: How Do We Identify an Open<sup>5</sup> Social Sphere?**

The concept of 'public spheres' has been used in many different ways at different times. I want to examine the relative degree of openness of arenas that comes about through people's fight for power and rank in present day globalized social contexts. An eventual open sphere would then be a configuration of social spaces<sup>6</sup> and arenas that every member of local and national communities thinks s/he has legitimate access to, and that s/he actually shares with others.

The access to and performances in all social arenas are regulated by rules of behaviour, verbal and embodied, and nonverbal behaviour. Notions of nation, state; of the politics of collective access, i.e. of 'publicness' and of democracy, are certainly not yet shared by everybody in Northern Cameroon. One may say they might be being built little by little. And, one has to be aware that local African ways of organizing space and spheres may very well imply interesting ways of assuring collective interests.<sup>7</sup> These rules may assure qualities of human life that could be looked upon as a gift to the global community and as an offer of very interesting principles. This is why it is important that one identifies the concrete local organization of social space and arenas; of the activities, social actors and specific forms of sociability that are related to these African spaces and spheres. Before even thinking of 'public', a concept of Western origin (Habermas 1984), we have to understand the current local transformation of organization of intimacy and of differentiated access to participation in more open social spaces and arenas. From there, we will be able to discover whether a public sphere (and an individual space) reflecting collective and shared notions about common and collective interests and rights actually exists. If they exist, we may disclose whether there are possibilities that they be conveyed to authorities.<sup>8</sup>

Before I enter into the stories about the two Fulbe characters in northern urban Cameroon from 1982 to 2008, I need to offer further details of my analytical position. I deal with three perceptions of time and space: historical time, generational time and my own anthropological time (Rudie 2008). The historical time is the one historians work with, as for instance the history of the Fulbe expansion in Africa: Historians work with documents, remnants and oral traditions in their efforts to describe societal change through time. Generational time is the more or less shared perceptions, social rules and bodily behaviours of a group of people of same age, living together in a certain span of time and in social spaces that they recognize and share. These may be inscribed or incorporated (Connerton 1989). Anthropological time is my (the anthropologist's) perception, inscribed and incorporated, of a specific society as it has evolved through my relationship to it, the moments I have spent with it at various points in time. My perceptions and embodied learning may be partly overlapping with the one of members of the society that is the object of my study. Through time, people change their perception of their own lives and of their own experiences. So does the anthropologist. There is no correct and true form 'out there'. There are constantly changing conditions leading to changed experiences, social spaces and social arenas (Rudie 2008).

If we want to identify an eventual 'publicness', an openness of a social arena in a specific African society, we may enter the generational time of

people of different age by exploring how they are involved in different social arenas and what characterizes their different sociability there when they enact their everyday practices. The sociability constitutes the rough material for social roles. The anthropologist develops sensitivity towards different people's sociability through fieldwork. This sensitivity allows the anthropologist to identify different social situations and arenas that different people 'see' and their related behavioural patterns, i.e., their social roles. If s/he wants, s/he may also try to learn how the roles enacted in an open arena are built into the identity packages of the social persons of the society (Grønhaug 1978, Barth 1981b).

When moving around a person is carrying his/her incorporated cognitive and social skills like a cultural formation. The person represents a 'unit' in a pluralized (or 'globalized') world by being a configuration of skills, sociability and search for meaning. Integration and stability consist in the person's trying to find meaning in a changing world by incorporating new experiences in his/her already existing experience structure. Globalization may be seen as a force that may put pressure on such local integration. The unity of the person and the relative stability may represent obstacles to change.<sup>9</sup> Maybe a fundamental resistance also lies in the person's involvement in space? And maybe such involvement in space may be the reason why (local) cultural differences survive in spite of intense cross-border traffic of cultural material (Rudie 2008).

#### Yoruba made a drawing of a Manga woman

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I made a drawing of her classmates



From the exhibition 'Mainé Soroa: A Village in Niger' at the University Museum of Tromsø in 1974<sup>10</sup>



### **Visualization as a Tool in Applied Research**

In my methodological approach, I put much weight on the visual dimension. Visual, nonverbal and oral communications are different from written. They convey different things and release different emotions from written texts (McDougall 2006). The rules that allow us to send and receive visual, non-verbal and oral messages promote other forms of experience and knowledge for people and for researchers than the rules of written communication and dissemination. I have always used drawings, photographs, expositions and films as tools in my research in order to discover other people's and my own incorporated knowledge; to identify social persons, their identity packages, i.e., persons as cultural formations, in the communities I study (Holtedahl 1993, 1996, 2009).

I screen images and films for partners and people to try out my preliminary understanding of bodily behaviour, social events and of people's idiomatic expressions in the rushes through tentative explicit interpretations. People will always correct my statements and make me see other meanings, enactment of different role repertoires and not the least; they will indicate to me the conditions and constraints that they see themselves (Barthes 1967; Holtedahl 1973, 1978). Within the analytical framework presented here, the supposed dominance of economic dynamics then means a pressure on the local-global interaction processes and thereby on the configuration of skills and sociability of local actors. It also means that economic dynamics are visible in local social interaction.

### **Africa and the West as Global and Local Systems of Interaction**

Since 1980, Northern Cameroon has been my field of study. Key themes concern the question of how forms of power/subordination and richness/poverty are transformed through socio-political and socioeconomic processes in Cameroon and Africa and in their relationship to the West. It is my impression that the gap between rich and poor in Africa and between Africa and the West grows deeper. Researchers must focus on local African people's resistance and adaptive strategies vis-à-vis global dynamics to understand why (Fanon 1952). A way of doing this is by identifying the interface of local and global dynamics in different African societies. Where goes the line between local and global powers of decision?

In our search for the qualities of today's open arenas in Africa, we have to look at local events of a 'public' character in Africa, at people's relationship to the Cameroonian state in Cameroon. Today, many social fields comprising numerous local arenas involve local people in the global world. Inhabitants of African nations are involved in the fields of religion (Muslim, Protestant,



and Catholic), economy, politics, sport, etc. These are of large or global scale. Protestants in northern Cameroon are directly linked to the Protestant Mission in Norway and the United States. Muslims in Ngaoundéré are linked to the global Muslim world. The Cameroonian state is related politically and economically through its political actors to France, the United States, China. What are the social fields and what are their proper dynamics, *eigendynamik*, and how do they articulate with people's cultural baggage in Ngaoundéré? In our search for aspects of openness, 'publicness', we should not only scrutinize the behaviour of representatives of state and local administration towards local populations. This might make us reify 'public' at the cost of concealing genuinely African forms of organization of space. My material includes everyday interaction in local African contexts and Europeans' behaviour (including my own), and interaction with Africans in African arenas, and vice versa, African actors on the arenas of the West.

I have screened films and film rushes from Africa in Africa and Norway, France, England and many other countries. I have been moving around in social fields of different scale in Africa and in the West. I have especially scrutinized Norwegians' perspective on, interpretation of and knowledge about Africa and interaction with Africans. It is my opinion that in the ongoing processes of globalization, the Western (Norwegian) populations accumulate ignorance about Africa all the while it seems that the opposite is happening. Television programmes, radio and the Internet provide information about Africa but television programmes about Africa are seldom directed so as to open the windows through which Norwegian people look. Their glasses stay ethnocentric (Tvedt 2005). The enormous information flow gives people a facile illusion of learning. There is a great difference between information, understanding and knowledge. The consequence is that many people in the North ignore the concrete initiatives for societal development continuously taken by local people in African countries to promote their collective or individual interests. The ignorance also has consequences when Africans face Western actors in and outside Africa. This means that resistance from African partners may not be taken into consideration by Westerners. For instance, people in Norway do not know African rules of respect. They would not be able to read the current fights for influence and rights in Africa either. Norwegians' strategies for African development are often built on this lack of knowledge of African competences and skills. I therefore want to pay great attention to the (visual) expression that my two characters convey when interacting with people from abroad, Europeans in Europe and in Cameroon. I hope this will allow me to discover the relative power of definition of partners in negotiations, of setting the rules on different social arenas.

Scholars in the North often frame African societies ethnocentrically in spite of their efforts to implement a cross-cultural perspective. In order to help marginalized people, for instance, many Norwegian social scientists concentrate their studies on the marginalized groups (Tvedt 2005). Their cultural baggage makes them blind to their own political correctness and studying locally powerful personalities may not seem important to them. This reflects the culturally defined well known Norwegian 'good intentions'. Norwegians want to be equal and good 'helpers', and they are easily caught in vicious circles generated by their belief that this is also taken for granted by others. They do not easily see, either, if what they do to others is of any help (Gullestad 2003, 2007). These attitudes also often make Norwegian development workers and administrators insensitive to the mechanisms that reproduce the asymmetric relations between people from the South and North. In this way, the struggle of leading Norwegian politicians against the ultra-conservative forces that do not want Africans to come to Norway paradoxically reproduces and enhances imbalance in their relations to Africans (Tvedt 1998, 2006). My conclusion is that dynamics in this social field, Norwegian development work in Africa, generates a North-South sphere with typical asymmetrical positions and interaction perceived of by Westerners as 'public'.

My story about people in power in Ngaoundéré may illustrate the importance of 'studying up' for the comprehension of global and local marginalization processes: the growing gap between rich and poor and between Africa and the West. By studying powerful people's performances in new arenas, I find the characteristics of present forms of openness, 'publicness'. Applied visual anthropology may allow us to reveal and grasp the qualities of the imbalanced encounters in new open arenas and thereby help us develop strategies that may weaken the dynamics that widen the gap between rich and poor in Africa and between Africa and the West.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Sultan and the Industrialist: Differentiation of Expressions of Muslim, Political and Economic Power?**

After visiting and living in urban northern Cameroon for many years, what have I learned about local people's perception and definition of arenas? Did I find some regional or national arenas that were organized in the democratic sense of rights to equal participation in arenas? By studying the organization of people's experience-space could I discover the pressure of global fields and their relative role in the creation and reproduction of power and subordination? Did I identify the interface of local (African) and global dynamics (here Western), and grasp local people's strategies in the face of local (and global) challenges?

First, I must introduce you to two significant personalities. Lamiido Issa Maigari, the Sultan, was an important person, politically, religiously and judicially, for the inhabitants of Ngaoundéré and rural Adamaoua in his 25 year-reign, 1970-1995. The political, judicial and religious dynamics of his time had economic impacts on the life of the local population. Sultan Issa Maigari is seen as a Pullo leader. His mother, however, is Mbum and his father is the former Pullo Sultan, whose mother is also Mbum. Al Hajji Jawri<sup>12</sup> is an important Muslim industrialist living in contemporary Ngaoundéré. Until recently, he was very powerful economically, politically and judicially and influenced nearly all regional development processes. He lost his father when still a child and lived as a poor herdsman, then progressively as shoemaker, smith and tailor. Later he became a bus-driver, owned a transport company and from the 1980s was an important economic, political, religious and social actor not only in Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua but also in the entire north of Cameroon and the nation. He is a member of the 'Bureau Politique' of the President's party, the RDPC.<sup>13</sup> He says his father is a Pullo and that he is himself a Pullo. His father comes, however, from a mixed Njamdji<sup>14</sup>-Fulbe village. His mother comes from Chad and belongs to one of the ethnic groups there. He grows up in Mbumdjeere, the Mbum quarter of Ngaoundéré.

I spent altogether several years on the carpets in the reception halls, *jawleeji*,<sup>15</sup> of the two powerful personalities, i.e., in what they would call their open space, *mi wurti*.<sup>16</sup> The question is to what extent this space may be seen as an element, an open arena, in an embryo of a 'public' sphere as defined above. I have taken many photographs and filmed their everyday activities in their personal reception arenas in their respective palaces. I am able to show to you these behaviours in my photographs and film rushes.

My hypothesis says that economic dynamics overrides other dynamics, for instance local cultural, religious and traditional political dynamics, as to the determination of new behavioural forms and rules of access<sup>17</sup> to new open arenas. This means that poor people have not much say in the negotiations and definitions of new behavioural rules in the emergent open arenas. Their propositions are eventually rejected. The part of your social identity that is displayed in one of these open arenas is in this way governed or directed by others. It is the people who have money and therefore power whose propositions for new behavioural rules, social skills and different social arenas that count. As it is the case with these arenas it is also with most Cameroonian and other arenas of African, Western or Asian economic actors. We have to do with global economic dynamics, and they cover arenas of global scale.

I have come to the above hypothesis through a humdrum comparison of the life stories and careers of these two characters, one a traditional political leader, and the other an upstart industrial entrepreneur, and their inscribed

and incorporated behaviour, mainly in Ngaoundéré but also in Yaoundé, in France (the Sultan and Al Hajji) and Norway (the Sultan).

I find many resemblances as well as differences in their behaviour as Muslim men in power. This I can see when I dig deeper into their respective life stories; into their own repertoire of social space and of social arenas; into the historic past of the Fulbe and their emergence as a hybrid Muslim group with what may be seen as a superficial Fulbe identity in Ngaoundéré and northern Cameroon (Taguem 1996, Adama 2004, Njeuma 1978, Hamadou 2005, Djingui 2000, Burnham 1991, 1996, Vereecke 1989, Schultz 1979); and into my own inscribed and incorporated behaviour as they enfold on their carpets through 25 years and as they may be revealed in the film rushes. Lamiido Issa Maigari allows me not only to film his secluded wives,<sup>18</sup> but also his concubines<sup>19</sup> and female servants.<sup>20</sup> He also allows public screenings in Ngaoundéré, on local people's television, on BBC and Scandinavian television, of images of his four secluded wives in what I see as his efforts to stay in power as a political leader. He actively tries to use the new interest from the outside world (Saïd 1997)<sup>21</sup> – a new global sphere, an open one? – for himself as an African Sultan and for his family to compensate for what he experiences as a progressive loss of local power.

About ten years younger, the industrialist, Al Hajji Jawri, would never allow anybody from local or global communities (open spheres) to see photographs or filmed images of his four wives, even less on an international television channel. One has to look into the experience space of each of my characters and into their different economic positions to understand the genesis of their different adaptive strategies, i.e., the field of economic dynamics. Why does a traditional political and religious leader break local Muslim rules of behaviour? And why does the 'innovator', the upstart and industrialist, stick to them? In order for me to check this dominance of economics as to explaining adaptive strategies, I have to look into and compare the consequences of state, i.e., politics, of literacy,<sup>22</sup> and of richness, i.e. economics, in the Muslim community of Ngaoundéré (Holtedahl 1983). If we enter the generational time of the two characters, we find that global and local economic dynamics are decisive for people's strategies and the change in their space orientation in the modern Muslim society of Northern Cameroon.<sup>23</sup> I want to show how economic dynamics hampers equity in access to new open realms, the ideal, democratic realms that all modern states are supposed to create and protect. In my anthropological perspective, it is the economic dynamics that encourage the very rich man to create unity and balance in his local image of self by expressing and stressing traditional male idioms of power. The traditional leader, losing money and power, wants to do the opposite.

**Pastoral Fulbe's Gendered Space: The Wodaabe and the Mbororo**

I learnt 'traditional' Fulbe expressions of gender and space in Borno (northern Nigeria and eastern Niger) and in the northern Cameroon region among Wodaabe and Mbororo families through my life as an anthropologist. After 1970, I lived as a member of a Wodaado family in Eastern Niger. My closest collaborator was Gorjo bii Riima, a Hanagamba<sup>24</sup> man born around 1946. He taught me Hausa, the lingua franca in the area, and helped me in establishing contacts with the citizens of Mainé Soroa and the pastoral populations (Holtedahl 1973).

From 1982 to today, I have also been a member of a Mbororo family in Cameroon, the relatives and children of Malam Oumarou Nduudi.<sup>25</sup> Both families live under extremely modest economic conditions, surviving with a few cattle, some agriculture, and sale of milk, butter and traditional medicine. From my own involvement in their lives and from anthropological texts (Dupire 1970, Stenning 1958, 1959, Vereecke 1989, Djingui 2000, Riesman 1979, Boutrais 1984, Bocquené 1986) and films (Bovin 1991, 2000, Ahmadou 2007, Baba 2003, Holtedahl 1997) I learnt a gender specific organization of behaviour, experience and space among these pastoral Fulbe. The Wodaabe and the Mbororo organize their camps into a female and a male space. All domestic work and the social relations of men and women are differentiated along gender lines. The work and sociability are gendered. Men's space is centralized; women's is reticulated, compartmentalized (Bonnemaison 2005). Men stay in their quarters, women in theirs. There are neither tents nor houses, but every adult woman has her own fireplace, cooking and milking equipment. The husband sits together with other men on the opposite side of the calf-rope that divides the wife's space from his. All physical and bodily behaviour of all members and visitors is regulated very strictly on the basis of gender. One notices an invisible architecture, so to speak, that organizes the open space in which they all live. Women only cross the 'wall' when bringing food to the husband and his visitors. Women communicate with children and female relatives in their open space and men with men in their open space. The experiences of men and women and their space are different as regards numbers, size and structure. They are conditioned by a certain coordination of body and the materiality of space. Women fetch water, prepare food and milk. Men manage the movements and reproduction of herds. Husbands and male relatives are authorities around whom women and children circulate.

Hude's, Gorjo's wife's, quarter

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Gorjo's sons and grandsons gathering on their mats

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Gorjo and Hude visiting me in 'my quarter'

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Men take the important decisions as to where and when to move. Men represent the families in relation to decisions about access to wells, local authorities, veterinarians, etc. Recently, Gorjo became a representative of his Wodaabe group at the local municipality council. Through the forty years I have known them, there has been very little change in their way of life. I have seen the incorporated generational behavioural practices and the gendered person as cultural formation being reproduced through two to three generations. These families relate to local and regional communities; to markets and people at the wells, as they did before. I wanted to follow up on the socio-cultural continuities, as they might be expressed in generational performances and personal and cultural formation by the now sedentary Fulbe-ized urban groups (Azaria 1978, Schultz 1979, Van Santen 1993) of northern Cameroon, by visiting two milieus in Ngaoundéré, Adamaoua, Sultan Issa Maigari's and Al Hajji Jawri's. But, first, I will present a summary of the historical time.

### **The Fulbe Conquerors and the Conquered**

Around two hundred years ago, the first pastoral Fulbe arrived in northern Cameroon in search of new grazing grounds. They came originally from Mali, Macena. At that time, they were living like the Mbororo and Wodaabe do today. But some of them had converted to Islam when staying in the Muslim Borno Empire headed by the Kanuri people and they led a religious war, a *Jihad*, under Ousmane dan Fodio who conquered local populations and founded Sultanates in northern Cameroon. Sultanates characterized by centralized political leadership based on slavery, physical violence and strict social hierarchies were established in the process. In Ngaoundéré, local sedentary groups, Mbum, Gbaya and Ndiï, were assimilated into fulbe-dominated Muslim empires. Through very subtle political diplomacy and force, the Mbum were assimilated into the Sultanates. They were delegated varying tasks and responsibilities (as slaves, servants, soldiers, tax collectors, etc.). The Mbum were humiliated by this experience. The humiliation led – among other things – to reduction in the fertility of these people,<sup>26</sup> the reproduction of generational behaviour, and the transformation of persons as a cultural formation (Hino 1984,1993). The Gbaya, Ndiï <sup>27</sup> and especially the Mbum lost self respect and incorporated the new political environment into new attitudes and images of self. In modern Cameroonian public arenas, such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, the expression of the differently inscribed and incorporated Gbaya and Ndiï experience may be observed in the current inter-ethnic struggle over influence (Lode 1990, Drønen 2007, Gullestad 2007). Many Mbum people, originally the dominant population in Ngaoundéré (Gondolo 1967), have 'become Fulbe' today. The Fulbe

did not use physical violence, it is said, when the Mbum population was incorporated politically as subordinates in the Fulbe Sultanate of Ngaoundéré. So states the present Bellaka SawMbum of Nghanha. The process relied on Mbum tradition. In spite of being organized in a centralized political kingdom, their incorporated behaviour towards strangers is expressed in hospitality, and as a result they would not refuse to collaborate with the Fulbe when they were asked to 'collaborate', intermarry etc., in a new political organization. The Mbum who stay Mbum in Ngaoundéré today have lost power progressively with the diminishing of the power of the Sultanate.<sup>28</sup> After the multiparty elections in 1992 they have, however, become more visible as a people and cultural tradition. This story, or history, resumes the interethnic traditions and behavioural practice in the 'former open arenas' of the Fulbe Sultanates of Adamaoua.

The new Sultanate of Ngaoundéré,<sup>29</sup> formerly the centre of the Mbum kingdom with its Bellaka,<sup>30</sup> incorporated especially the Mbum political traditions (a government with ministers responsible for politics, health, agriculture, magic, etc.) all the while the Mbum were violently oppressed as a people. The Bellaka had to give young Mbum women as slaves and wives to the Lamiido. The architecture of the Sultan's palace, the building techniques, the crafts; the court and the ministers of the Faada, all represent the continuity of a gendered Mbum sociability and space (Tegomoh 2002, Faraut 1981, Hino 1984, 1993, Holtedahl 1993, 1996). A Mbum woman may not marry a Fulbe Sultan. The Sultan is however today seen as a Pollo, and descent is assured in the male line. The Sultan's children with his legitimate wives, Rewbe Teabe, 'become' Fulbe whether these are Hausa, kanuri or Fulbe.

Do we see any continuity of the organization of the gendered space and politics of the pastoral Fulbe and agricultural Mbum in Sultan Issa Maigari as a person as and cultural formation? Actually the gendered Mbum bodily behaviour is reinforced. The female servants are bowed when passing by men's arenas and get on their knees when in front of the Sultan in a typical Mbum way (Mahamadou 2001). We find the gendered Fulbe space and hierarchy too. The Rewbe Teabe spend all their time in their houses surrounded by Mbum servants who undertake all practical tasks. What impact then does the Cameroonian state presently have on these traditional ways of managing space? Do we find an emergence of a notion of publicness of the new arenas?

### **The Organization of Social Space and Arenas in the Sultan's Palace**

The palace is organized geographically into many separate quarters and rooms by high walls. These are divided into many arenas through the social organization of space. You pass through several entrance halls before you enter the last reception hall of the Lamiido. Behind the Sultan's reception



houses<sup>31</sup> (open or public arenas one wonders) you find his horse house, his equipment house with musical instruments, carpets, pillows, umbrellas, fans etc., and his private quarters and own house. In the innermost quarters, you find the huts of the Sultan's male servants, his mother's hut, his female servants and concubines' huts and wives' houses.

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The third entrance hall of the palace

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The Sultan's palace from above<sup>32</sup>

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The Sultan visiting one of his wives (Holtedahl 1993)



Female servants and concubines working in servants' quarters  
(Holtedahl 1993)



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A female servant on her knees asks the Sultan for attention

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The male servants, *maccube*,<sup>33</sup> must always kneel deeply in front of the Sultan. They do not look at him when talking. They may not sit on the Sultan's carpet. The female servants may not approach the Sultan when in an open arena. They also always have to lie down when they address the Sultan. Only the servants, however, are allowed to move around in the whole palace. They connect the secluded wives, the Sultan and the world. The Sultan's power and authority are expressed in the concubines' and servants' bodily attitudes, i.e., distance.

When the Sultan is accessible, *o wurti*,<sup>34</sup> i.e., to people from outside in his reception house, he constantly shifts place. The reception halls and courtyards are organized into different social spaces. Organizational rules, spaces and arenas, define different statuses and activities of his visitors and concern his protection against the evil plans of enemies. A mobile throne protects him against aggressors. People may never know where to find him. His ministers also are on their knees when addressing him. But they are on the carpet together with visitors from the province.

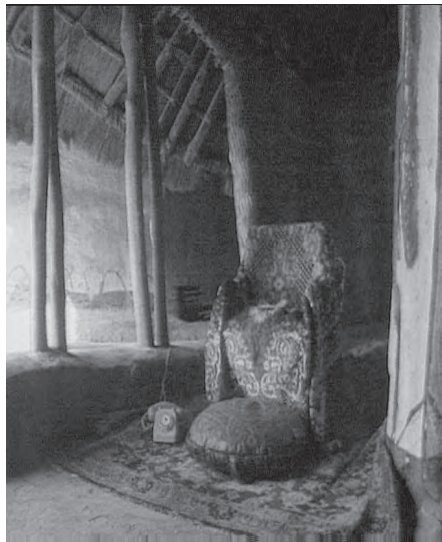
The Faada in front of one of the thrones demonstrating that they are ready to defend the Sultan from the Mbum rebels

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One of the Sultan's thrones

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The Bellaka's wives, children and grandchildren in the women's quarter,  
Nghanha Palace



The Bellaka in his reception hall, Nghanha



In this way, the Sultan's person and social space and authority are embodied and visualized in the behaviour of the people of the palace as well as by visitors. The Sultan as person, identity package and space has been incorporated through political strategies and oppression in the pluralistic context of Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua.

His person is a configuration of attitudes, skills and sociability reflecting political dominance, predatory expansion and the incorporation of cultural elements from the conquered group, the Mbum. The Mbum servants as persons express very different configurations. The Mbum experienced a conquest which puts their integrity under severe pressure. Their cultural persons are configurations of skills representing specific adaptive strategies to manipulations and oppression, they receive orders, they are subordinates to their Master.<sup>35</sup>

Compared to the Wodaabe and Mbororo women, Sultan Issa Maigari's wives (who are supposed to be Fulbe) are much more limited in their space. They only see children, female relatives and friends. They cannot go anywhere without the Sultan's permission. In their isolated houses, by entertaining female friendship and Fulbe family relationships, they reproduce their higher rank as Fulbe women towards the female and male Mbum servants. The Sultan's male prestige lies in the invisibility of his four wives. The invisible walls that organize the pastoral Fulbe's gendered social space may lie behind the gendered space organized by physical walls in the Sultan's palace. But the walls may also reflect a gendered Mbum tradition as well as a more recent urban, Arab, Muslim separation of men and women. Male and female Mbum servants in the palace assist as subordinates to the Fulbe (of hybrid origin) in the survival of total seclusion of the Fulbe wives by building and constantly rehabilitating the constructions of the palace and as messengers that connect the wives to the outer world.<sup>36</sup>

But, times are changing. As a white woman, I am allowed to sit on the sofa next to the Sultan when he receives people in his reception house. My eyes are at the same level as his! This is a total anomaly in the context of the Muslim Fulbe society of Ngaoundéré. This would only be possible for people who were not his subordinates from the Adamaoua province, and for his new superiors: representatives of the state, ministers, generals of the army, the governor and the Catholic archbishop, etc.

The army general greets the Sultan at the airport with a totally new sign:  
respect or lack of it?



As a white woman, I am a total stranger who does not conform to a locally organized gendered identity that could fit the rules of the Sultan's open space. Analytically, I may be seen as an agent of a force of globalization. And my relation to the Sultan may be seen as a current negotiation between local gendered power (economic and political) dynamics and global power (economic and political) dynamics since I belong to the North. Our negotiation takes place in his cultural space but our communication relates his space to me as a person and to my space of global scale. I am in his open arena. Do we see an embryo of an open global sphere? Does this articulation of local and global add a quality of publicness?

### **Continuity and Change in Fulbe Political Leadership: From Lion to Rabbit?**

Western education came late to northern Cameroon. President Ahidjo,<sup>37</sup> himself a Pollo from the North, had difficulties developing the uneducated Muslim and now also Christian North<sup>38</sup> in the 1960s and 1970s (Fah, Eldridge, Müller, Drønen). Local Sultans of the North were political anchors of the German and French colonizers, and Ahidjo continued to rely on them for political support. He also strengthened the position of the *Al Hajjis*<sup>39</sup> of the North, his own region, in order to promote economic enterprise and development. The rich Muslim entrepreneurs received huge loans from the

Cameroonian state, loans they never paid back. Gradually, a state apparatus was built in the North, and the position of the Sultans was threatened (Sadou 2001; Holtedahl 2009b).

Since 1982, Paul Biya has been President of Cameroon. He is a Catholic from the Centre. More and more bureaucrats from the South start working in the urban areas of the North. In 1991-1992, I collaborated closely with the Sultan of Adamaoua and the people in his palace for several months, while together with a film team I shoot the material for the film 'The Sultan's Burden' (Holtedahl 1993). It is a time of the preparation for the first multiparty presidential elections in Cameroon; a period of serious turmoil and rebellion, especially in the North. The new processes of democratization lead to a sharpening of regional ethnic dichotomization (Ela 1978, 1982; Burnham 1996; Holtedahl 1993). Some members of the Mbum community threaten the Fulbe lamidate. Many members of the Sultan's court, Faada,<sup>40</sup> shake their swords. The following year, the palace is set on fire and all the entrance halls burn down. One has the feeling that the state's effort to control the North may be rooted in a divide-and-rule policy towards the different groups of the region.

By then the Fulfulde language is only spoken in the Sultan's *jawleeru*, i.e. in the Sultan's open space. These organizational rules, this space, still govern most behaviour in new open arenas in Ngaoundéré and Adamaoua. The Sultan receives generals and ministers; vice-chancellors and provincial delegates; Protestants and Catholics; Gbaya and Ndiï peasants, pastoral Fulbe, sedentarized Fulbe and urban Fulbe citizens; women and men but no representatives of the rural and urban Mbum society.<sup>41</sup> He presides over the traditional court of Adamaoua,<sup>42</sup> assists the *sousprefets* and the *prefets* in their tax collection in the arrondissements, departments, provinces. Illiterate people fear him. But the literate do not.

Other dynamics also put the Sultan's identity management under pressure. Behind the walls of the palace the dominant language is Mbum. The Sultan's mother, a *sullado* of the Sultan's father, only speaks Mbum. When I meet former slaves, servants and craftsmen, they express suffering and hopelessness. They say they suffer a double oppression, the one of the Fulbe conquerors and in addition the consequences of the Sultan's progressive loss of power. Since Cameroonian independence most Sultanates of Northern Cameroon have declined. Only the famous Lamiido Rey Bouba has resisted and stays on as the head of a state in the state (Eldridge 1988, 1990, Müller 2000).

The Cameroonian state contributes strongly to the reduction of the Sultan's power. This decline of the Sultan's prestige and power is played out at various ceremonies that take place in front of the Governor's buildings, at the Place



de l'Indépendance. The ceremonies organized by the national authorities express visually the marginalization of the Sultan and his followers. Ministers, governor, provincial délégués, préfets and sous-préfets, vice-chancellor and heads of police and army sit in the middle on the first bench of the tribune whereas the Sultan sits on his traditional throne surrounded by his servants far out on the side – not in the centre of men who represent power.<sup>43</sup>

The Minister of the Interior gives his speech and demonstrates a new bodily and organizational language of power



The sayings of the Minister of Interior do not help either: 'We have to eliminate traditional ways of behaving in order to develop our country!' (Holtedah 1993).

The governor as well as the leaders of the army are now the Sultan's superiors. The Sultan has become an employee of the state and receives a monthly salary, around 300,000 CFA. He is allowed neither to receive a fixed part of the harvest from the peasants, nor to keep slaves. The former idioms of the master-slave relationship are no longer as relevant for communication, negotiation and dissemination in the new upcoming arenas of the municipalities, provinces and state, as they were. In these new arenas, everybody fights to obtain respect for their idioms of social rank, for their space and persons as cultural formations. The Sultan also fights. These arenas are totally dominated by men. Women who are present are singers, dancers and audience. Here, in these new arenas, it is the space of representatives of the President and of the local administrations that govern people's power of negotiation and definition. The Sultan has to adapt to this pressure on his image of self. His survival strategies reveal the weight of the incorporated Fulbe leadership in

this new socio-political context. Here lies the interface of the local, national and global roots of current power dynamics. Who defines access rights and rules of behaviour on the new arenas?

Who may and may not 'touch the Sultan's carpet' is less certain than before. Time has for instance become an 'object' of negotiation of relative power in these new open arenas. Whose definition of space wins? Now, when the Sultan is on his way to the local airport to receive the Minister of the Interior, he has to wait for five hours before the minister arrived. All the singers, dancers, local people see him sitting there all that time, waiting; he who is normally always supposed to make people wait. Like many other citizens, the Sultan has to fight to keep his position through continuous negotiations about how idioms of superior/subordinate, big/small have to be conveyed. Little help is to be found in the black limousine that takes him to the airport. The Sultan's 'modern' symbol does not add to his power of negotiation.

### Efforts to Enhance a Fulbe Regime

One day as I was filming in the palace, one of the Sultan's *scalds* (*griots, bambaabe*<sup>44</sup>), screamed to me and my camera 'Lamiido Issa Maigari is stingy! He only offers beans while he himself eats chickens! In former times he offered clothes, food, horses, everything we needed. Now, we only get the crumbs that the tourists give to us'. Not many servants heard what he said, but he spoke to my camera! A camera gives access to a new kind of arena, potentially a global one. Maybe this is frightening? Maybe they will offer the dreamt of opportunities?

The Sultan on his way to the airport to meet the Minister of the Interior  
(Holtedahl 1993)



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The Sultan is waiting and waiting till sunset before the Minister arrives  
(Holtedah 1993)

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In this case, however, I was within the Sultan's space, his open arena. In the Sultan's palace – as it was the case in the king's palaces in the Middle Ages in Europe – news circulates quickly. The Sultan was immediately informed about what the *scald* said. He has since long started directing 'my' film. This was a necessary consequence of my wish to have him teach me his perceptions, his space. I therefore soon found him sitting on one of his many thrones, tediously explaining to all his ministers why he had to be seen as a clever Sultan, and how he saw to it that everyone in his palace, his ministers included, were being taken well care of by him. He was not stingy!

My presence with the camera puts pressure on the Sultan but he profited from the fact that he and I collaborated on a film about him to negotiate with his servants, scalds and ministers, how his superiority and their subordination must be expressed and understood. He was also speaking to the BBC, Danish and Norwegian television companies, an open unknown sphere out there, a configuration of arenas, a global community that he knew of but did not really know. To me he said that the black man's magic is not as strong as the white man's. He also told me that he is shown more respect by white people in Cameroon than from his new black superiors, his subordinates and servants. He therefore wanted so much, he said, to go to *lesdi nasaara*,<sup>45</sup> the white man's land.

The Sultan is explaining to his court why they must respect his leadership in the face of change (Holtedahl 2002)



### The Lion's Dream

Later on I had the opportunity to discover what happens when Lamiido Issa Maigari visited Norway and different ways of organizing experience and social space meet, Norwegian and Cameroonian/Fulbe, when the Sultan meets people at my University, missionaries in Stavanger, etc. In the Norwegian arenas where these different repertoires and skills meet, we find the interface of global and local dynamics. What is, for instance, the scale of the incorporated skills of a Muslim Fulbe Sultan's person as cultural formation? Can he, at all, use his competence and skills in Norway? To what extent do Norwegian norms decide how things must be done in his presence?

When I asked my colleagues from Norwegian universities, whose students are being well received by Sultan Issa Maigari when they do fieldwork in Adamaoua, to invite Sultan Issa Maigari to visit their universities and the University of Tromsø, they told me that this was not a proper academic initiative but a tourist event. In the Norwegian academic field of African studies, where academics consider themselves as competent actors in the international arena (public arena?) this reaction reveals a gendered Norwegian space that organizes Sultans as belonging to a tourist category that cannot be linked to the academic sphere. Academics do not invite informants/research partners from the field to the academy. The Director of the Norwegian Research Council in Oslo,<sup>46</sup> however, was interested in the use-of-film-in-research-project about the Sultan and agreed to organize a workshop for the staff in the Research Council and at the University of Oslo, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Development Cooperation. 'The Sultan's Burden' was screened for a big audience, including Sultan Issa Maigari, in turban and *gandura*,<sup>47</sup> together with his *walkiiri*<sup>48</sup> and Minister of Cultural Affairs. Upon questions from the Norwegian audience about his experience from his stay in Norway, the Sultan replied surprisingly, that he actually felt like a 'small man' here in Norway. Ever since he was born, there had always been very many Norwegian missionaries in Ngaoundéré. He grew up with them, he told the audience. His grandfather gave land to these missionaries. He has also always imagined that he would meet as many Cameroonians in Norway. But to his surprise, he was told that there are only eight Cameroonians in the whole of Norway. This must be an expression of the white man's magic!

Since Norwegians had always behaved respectfully towards him in Ngaoundéré, he thought Norwegians in Norway would also behave respectfully towards him. The fact that there is only a small number of Cameroonians in Norway expresses, he said, a serious lack of hospitality towards Cameroonians which he felt as if it were a lack of respect for him and his forefathers. The elephant king,<sup>49</sup> the lion, has become a mouse or rabbit.

When the Sultan visited the University of Tromsø in northern, marginal, Norway the following days, students and staff tried to find out how to behave towards an African Sultan. It is not easy. But the Sultan appeared more relaxed since he knew many people there and he did not seem to feel as hurt as in Oslo. Should we consider the Sultan's visit to Norway an event in an open global sphere that includes Norwegian and African public arenas?

Sultan Issa Maigari visiting the Norwegian Research Council and  
greeting Director Tove Strand Gerhardsen (Holte Dahl 2009c)

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The Sultan giving a lecture about how he faces societal change at  
the Department of History, University of Oslo (Holte Dahl 2009c)

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Sultan Issa Maigari visiting my family and me with Dr. Trond Waage  
in Ersfjordbotn, Norway (Holtedahl 2009c)

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If the Sultan's visit to Norway does not satisfy his expectations, the rumours in Cameroon about his journey to the West, the white man's land, do. In the eyes of local Cameroonian *populations*, he might now be compared with other important Cameroonian men who travel to the white man's land – higher functionaries, university researchers, politicians. The Sultan's journey provokes at the same time a consolidation of his power in Cameroon and a threat to his image of self and in relation to his dream of acquiring political resources in Norway. His visit to the Norwegian Research Council resulted, however, in the allocation of funds for the establishment of a Master's degree programme in visual anthropology at the University of Tromsø, including scholarships for Cameroonian students.

In spite of all the difficulties the Sultan suffered, globalization and national and regional dynamics revitalized his position. When he died a few years later, one might have expected that the Sultanate would become a purely tourist kind of institution. But the opposite happened. Many ambitious men fought to have their candidate – one of the descendents of the Sultan – elected. The strong backstage involvement of the 'former' colonial powers and of the young state in the 'selection'/election of a new Sultan revealed that many people saw political potential and new opportunities in a blurred and conflict ridden context of local/national/global politics. To be an ally of a 'traditional Sultan' may be strong card in future multiparty elections. When finally all the local political, traditional and modern, elites agreed about a

candidate, the President of Cameroon set aside the local consensus and appointed his own candidate the following day. These events illustrate how national politics create new configurations of local, regional and national arenas (an emerging public sphere?).

I empathise with the Sultan, the big, small man. My empathy concerns the Sultan's helplessness that was revealed in Cameroon and Norway. The globalization processes promote pressures on the poor as well as on the rich and powerful men and women in Africa, and they enhance the hegemony of the West in Africa. The interface of global and local socio-political dynamics is very close to the ground. My film and fieldwork during endless hours and many years on the Sultan's sofa taught me much about the articulation of global and local power mechanisms.

### **Al Hajji Jawri: Creator of a Public Arena in Ngaoundéré?**

Al Hajji Jawri assured the symbolic survival of Lamiido Issa Maigari when he was most humiliated by the Cameroonian state's actions. Lamiido Issa Maigari feared to lose more respect and tried to find alliances locally in order to survive as the political leader of Adamaoua province. When once he took sides with one of the multiple new political parties, he was severely sanctioned by the state. The very rich Al Hajji Jawri helped him out. Al Hajji never went to school but he is the pioneer and founder of the first agro-industrial complex in Northern Cameroon, Maiscam.<sup>50</sup> He was the first Pollo to create an agricultural industry in the Sahel zone of West Africa. He is a member of the 'bureau politique' of the RDPC and had full support of the President. This means national support for import and export monopolies. Al Hajji supported the Sultan by rebuilding his palace. He paid for a new entrance hall, walls and buildings in modern Arab architecture, and he rehabilitated the mosque in front of the Sultan's palace.

Al Hajji Jawri is an 'arriviste' in the eyes of the Europeans and the elite from Southern Cameroon. Since 1997, I had collaborated with him on a film about his work and his career. His story teaches us important lessons about the transformation of Adamaoua society; and about an eventual emergence of 'open arenas' in Cameroon – and perhaps also in Africa. It is my knowledge of the Sultan on the one side and of his behaviour and influence on the other that leads me to present the hypothesis that the field of economics dominates in the moulding of the actual open arenas in Adamaoua.

### **Al Hajji's Career**

One of several mysterious aspects of Al Hajji's life is that, despite his never having attended school, he is still able to read and write. He speaks four African languages, in addition to French and English. He uses mystification



actively in his everyday enterprise of coordinating many worlds: Italy, France, USA, Cameroon, Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Mali; the banks, the industrial complex in Europe, the new elites in Cameroon, on the one side; poor people in Ngaoundéré, poor friends, immigrant workers, Rwandan refugees, herders, peasants on the other (Djingui and Holtedahl 2002, Geschiere 1995). He sticks to a Fulbe identity whereas everybody knows that his ancestors belonged to many other tribes – as is the case with most people assimilated into a kind of Fulbe identity. He says he is a Fulbe. His behaviour is that of a Fulbe, while he also regularly demonstrates his mastery of Mbum and Hausa conduct that he was familiar with during his childhood in the Mbum and Hausa quarters of Ngaoundéré (Gondolo 1978). People who explicitly manifest a Mbum identity, however, never appear on his carpet, the arenas he governs.

To be rich in a spectacular way is incompatible with the basic Fulbe notions of *pulaaku*.<sup>51</sup> Al Hajji Jawri's activities, his position in northern Cameroon, people's behaviour towards him, illustrate that his power today may be even stronger than that of a Sultan at the time of the Fulbe conquest. He has the power to influence the lives of ordinary people independently of the emergence of a seemingly more 'democratic' national policy. He decides where people work; if they may have work; what they earn; if they may vote; to whom they give their vote.

His life demonstrates the complexity of modern life in the region. From an analytical point of view, social persons represent a pluralistic, globalized world by being different highly complex configurations of competences, sociability and search for meaning. After his experience as a herdsman, a smith, shoemaker and tailor apprentice, Al Hajji became a driver apprentice. A friend, the Norwegian missionaries' driver, taught him how to drive. Al Hajji became the chauffeur and also the assistant nurse of a French military surgeon. The surgeon helped Al Hajji with a loan which allowed him to buy a bus. Through hard work, Al Hajji built a transport agency which carried people between Koussiri and Douala. He would drive day and night. People said that his magic was so powerful that it emptied the petrol from other people's cars when he passed by on his way to Garoua or Maroua. He became renowned for his intelligence and work capacity.

From 1997 to 2006, he worked on the building of a palace outside Ngaoundéré. Many white, European engineers and craftsmen assisted in the building. His architect, Peter, was from Serbia, had studied architecture in Rome and lived in Paris. Responsible for the electric installations was Monsieur Blacizeck from the former Yugoslavia. Responsible for the construction work was Monsieur Barison from Italy. Monsieur Franco, responsible for the tile-work was from Italy, and Monsieur Maniou was from France as was the person in charge of the staff work, Monsieur Gruel, and so on.

### **Al Hajji's Negotiated Position in Time, Space and the Cultural Process**

As it was the case with the Sultan, Al Hajji Jawri also felt belittled when he visited the white man's land. As mentioned in my introduction, Al Hajji felt humiliated by the people on the other end of the telephone when he called the taxi central in Paris to get a limousine. They recognized an African voice. He says this made him feel like a rabbit in the great city while he was considered a lion in Cameroon.

As I followed Al Hajji on his journeys with my film camera around the world, I was able, as was the case with the Sultan, to discover the interface between local and global social, economic politic dynamics, to see what kind of pressures they exert on local integration. The use of the camera allowed me to study the negotiations of Al Hajji with all kinds of people and to learn the idioms he used in order to convey the image of himself that suited him in Europe and in Cameroon. Analytically, we may see these efforts as expressions of his creation of a new kind of position in the context of a specific generational time and of local people's embodied behaviour. A question one may ask is: why did Al Hajji build a huge palace in Adamaoua since he did not want to be considered a person suffering from 'folie de grandeur',<sup>52</sup> and since he already had a big house and a private mosque in town, a ranch in the bush, a compound at Maiscam, a villa in Douala, and apartments in Paris and a castle in southern France? And also, since Fulbe values say that ostentatious behaviour is contrary to Fulbe identity, to *pulaaku*.

Al Hajji relating his philosophy and magical powers in his castle  
in France (Holtedahl 2002)



In Cameroon, Al Hajji feels like a lion, while the Sultan is an elephant. The Sultan's court reinforces his leadership through its incorporated embodied behaviour. The court and the people on the carpet represent many layers of the urban society of Ngaoundéré. The persons around Al Hajji, in spite of having no formal economic, political or administrative positions within the present state, represent important powers rooted in Al Hajji's economic and political position. Many of them are highly educated (accountants, directors of his industries), others have been trained at the Sultanate (advisors, intelligence agents, and guardians). Among those who eat meals with him in his *jawleeru*, you will also find his closest friends from his childhood. These childhood acquaintances take care of small daily tasks involved in running his business and exerting his influence. You may also find people who betrayed him in childhood. You find beggars and refugees from Rwanda, Chad, Congo. When I was present, I could see that Al Hajji ran much of his life like the Sultan in his palace. The idioms are the same: the physical positions of the people present; the distance; the bowed backs. If a woman enters she is on her knees and leaves as soon as she has received Al Hajji's message or asked him for a favour. This is a male community. The women are behind the walls, as in the Sultan's court. Al Hajji covers all expenses. The only observable idiomatic difference from the Sultan's reception hall lies in the fact that if he does not sit in one of the five sofas, Al Hajji often sits on the floor himself, among his people, but always at the head of the circle. By doing so he expresses the inherited and embodied meaning of equality among men, of male sociability.

Al Hajji sitting on the carpet. He mediates by imposing solutions on and paying gifts to small people to keep his allies, the local authorities in power (Holtedahl 2002)



There is, however, no role for women in this arena, a somewhat open arena, in Al Hajji's space, except for their very short visits. They do not belong. I myself am as it were 'matter out of place'.<sup>53</sup> I am 'not present'. If I am addressed by Al Hajji, an entirely new role is being generated by him in his space, in his public sphere, as was the case at the Sultan's palace: I am a white person, a social person he knows how to deal with. In his house in Ngaoundéré, my presence allows him in a sense to show his Western competence. He legitimizes my presence by saying to everybody that I am making a film to tell another story about black people who succeed in order to correct white people's notions of Africans as poor and prone to making wars. Her film is about clever, successful and rich black people, he says. He offers me the opportunity to become a new kind of local/global actor in a transformed male arena. But as a woman, I am addressed by him as a subordinate. He gives me orders as to a woman behind the walls or to a servant. I am told to 'go and eat now'; 'go to the periphery now', and so on. Is this a germ of a new open (public) arena becoming part of a wider African sphere where women are 'allowed' to be present?

Al hajji sits on the carpet with his Christian female secretary. 'Christian Women are more trustworthy', he says (Holtedahl 2002)



It is his wealth that allows Al Hajji to gather a court around him that is much larger than the one of the Sultanate. He has become the new Sultan in Ngaoundéré. People address him exactly like a Sultan. He even performs

judicial functions for all men on the carpet. He 'solves' their conflicts in a way that enhances his control with state employees and traditional leaders. He offers them gifts to induce them to accept the authorities' decisions. He also scolds his subjects. He moralizes for hours. He reprovcs the director of his own cinema theatre, because he has heard that the director tried to seduce a married woman. What would the world look like if he himself did a thing like that? All this happens in front of the camera. He is also taking on himself the role of a model for religious behaviour. Thousands of people gather at Friday prayers in his private mosque. His personal imam follows him and his supporters all over the world.

Al Hajji impressing the anthropologist with stories about his paranormal competence manifested since his childhood (Holtedahl 2002)



All Al Hajji's economic enterprises are anchored in the global economic field. He necessarily becomes a central political actor. His economic enterprises are protected by the President through monopolies and he is therefore the person who choreographs all the campaigns of the RDPC at all municipal and presidential elections in Northern Cameroon.

The President of Cameroon is dependent on Western regimes.<sup>54</sup> You cannot avoid the white man as a partner or a boss if you are the President of Cameroon. This also counts for he who manages extensive international economic activities. His position as a kind of Sultan is not a sufficient source of economic success and political power. Al Hajji also has to cope with big Western companies – in Cameroon, France, Italy and elsewhere – if he wants to continue to succeed. He has not only to prevent Westerners, the whites, from treating him as a rabbit in Paris. He has to be treated with respect by the many white men who come to Cameroon to assist in the building of his palace. These men do not show Al Hajji the respect that one owes a local Sultan. He has to negotiate with them and he has to give orders to his people about how to behave towards the white men who visit him. He must oblige his court to accept, for instance, that white men do not need to sit on the floor. The negotiations about who must take off his shoes shows to what degree a local or global power of definition is being institutionalized in this local African context. The white man seems to receive privileged treatment.

Black Cameroonians<sup>55</sup> are not the only ones forced to negotiate the power of definition. The white man who comes to Africa has to cope with new rules of power and influence. It is interesting that a number of ‘rabbits’ from Europe openly say that they have become ‘lions’. Nobody in France builds castles like Versailles today. When Al Hajji moved into his palace after ten years of construction work, there were fifteen new palaces that had been built in the meantime. When he started, there were none.

Al Hajji built his palace along the lines of the principles that characterized the Sultanate as well as the Mbororo and Wodaabe ‘houses’ and the Mbum architectural tradition. Such a style includes several strictly separate quarters: the reception part (the guardians’ house, the reception hall, the mosque, the guest houses), then Al Hajji’s own building complex arranged so as to allow them to meet people from Africa and the North (you find marble fountains, swimming pool, an enormous dining room, crystal chandeliers, handmade Chinese carpets, golden fixtures in bathrooms) and finally, behind tall walls, the quarter where wives, servants and children live. The architecture is an expression of global and local traditions, a mixture of oriental, Muslim and Mbum architecture. Al Hajji’s palace allows him to receive people in the way of the Sultan, on the carpet in the *jawleeru*; and as the white man receives prominent guests, in big saloons in his own building. Here, he receives Cameroonian politicians, military leaders, white industrialists, ambassadors. An entirely new scene is constructed in which new events of a public character will take place in the future. The actors as well as the rules of the games are being defined in a complex moulding process where questions about ‘who is up and who is down’ are constantly being posed. The sudden richness lies behind.

Carrying concrete to the building site (Holtedahl 2002)



Al Hajji with friends on the building site describing the future beauty and costs of the palace (Holtedahl 2002)



Al Hajji mediates global/national/local political and economic dynamics. It is in this palace that one sees the global pressure from the economic field and how it releases, through Al Hajji and his peers, new rules for the expression of power. It is apparent that Western rules for conveying power dominate African styles.

Many of the white building and electrical engineers, gardeners and so on look down on Al Hajji. In their eyes, he is an upstart. They express this attitude in many different ways through their embodied language. It hurts Al Hajji. And it often also is expressed behind his back – as when he spends several hours discussing with a French gutter company team where to put gutters in the palace. The palace has roofs, not only on all houses, but also on all walls and columns.

When Al Hajji, very seriously, evaluates the aesthetic outcome of gutters on all these thousands of roofs, the engineers with apparently serious expressions but showing that they have difficulties hiding how ridiculous they find him, start counting how many kilometres of gutters are needed to cover all these roofs. Actually there is no need whatsoever for gutters on the walls and columns. This may be seen as a global pressure on a local identity and a global pressure in a public arena.

The greatest pain is felt by Al Hajji in his negotiations and quarrels with Peter, his architect (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2005). This arises given the economic risks and the threats to Al Hajji's own dignity: the architect knows how to promote his own self-interest, and how to challenge Al Hajji's self image. Al Hajji sets many traps when they visit the Fiera del Milano, Milan's annual furniture market, in order to prevent Mr Peter benefiting himself by directing Al Hajji to pre-selected furniture salesmen.

At the Fiera, Peter and Al Hajji discuss with great fervour what is in good taste and what furniture will suit the palace under construction in Ngaoundéré. Peter prefers simple and elegant furniture. Al Hajji wants to buy big, heavy and dark furniture, ornamented in gold. Al Hajji patiently tries convince Peter why he wants to buy the heavy Louis XVI furniture. Only such furniture will impress and pay respect to the local population in Ngaoundéré. Make them dizzy. If he puts the furniture that Peter recommends in the *jawleeru* local people will think it has been bought in the local market in Ngaoundéré. In other words, Peter's furniture would not make Al Hajji a big man in the eyes of the local population. Peter criticizes Al Hajji and says that he has a vulgar taste. He is not civilized (Arntsen and Holtedahl 2006). Al Hajji gets cross and says that the one who does not wear a *gandura* is the uncivilized one.<sup>56</sup>



My film material shows many scenes where Peter and Al Hajji openly quarrel about what rules they should adhere to. For example, without Peter's permission we hear that Al Hajji has copies made of some of Peter's drawings, and directs his masons to construct other copies of the house – five or six at his hotel in Garoua in Northern Cameroon, four at his ranch near in Ngaoundéré – without paying Peter his commission. Al Hajji's and Peter's efforts to build an image of self are confronted continuously. Al Hajji knows that Peter would not be able to obtain such commissions in France as in Cameroon. It gives him some power over Peter. Peter in turn says that he works with primitive people in Africa.

Al Hajji trying to convince Peter ... with his whole body  
(Holtedahl 2002)



At times, Al Hajji's international economic ambitions force him to swallow the white man's idioms of hierarchy. One day, he says about Peter to Mr Blacizek: 'A Serb who says that a black man is not civilized!'. Al Hajji thinks

that 'I have realized that I, "un noir", cannot be a friend of a white man.<sup>57</sup> The white man does not know how to show respect to people in Africa'.

As long as this hurdle is not overcome and routinized behaviour developed that expresses equality at the local/global level, for instance in the arenas of foreign policy, the quarrels continue. Continuously, the two men try to compensate for their experience of a lack of equality wherever they meet, at the building site, in big luxury stores in Europe. The important difference lies in the fact that only Al Hajji really experiences a loss of dignity in the West and in Africa. Maybe it is in the humiliation and shame we find the germ of the building of the palace?

Al Hajji in his villa in Douala talking about white-black relations  
(Holtedah 2002)



I have film rushes of events that express how Al Hajji's everyday life developed and was 'constructed' over ten years. I am conscious about the dangers that lie in my handling of them as to his image in the Muslim, Western and African worlds. I am also aware that I will be able to use the material to make a documentary that narrates the articulation and relative pressures of national, international socioeconomic, political dynamics on Al Hajji. But I of course do not wish to make Al Hajji look ridiculous or to objectify him as a

person. I want to use the striking images of events that I have shot to convey his gaze on African societies, on Africa's relation to the West. My position in the global/local processes in which Al Hajji lives is the one of a catalyst who may or may not damage his opportunities (Gullestad 2007). I am myself among those who, in relationship with Al Hajji, articulate the pressure on the integration of the local person as cultural formation. I am also potentially promoting an image of Al Hajji as an agent of local adaptive strategies, the local resistance to globalization as well as an agent of global pressures on local communities. My camera also potentially disseminates his voice to the national and international community. My camera and our film become an agent in an open, local and global sphere.

### **A Time of Crisis**

When I visited Al Hajji recently, I was reminded of the power that lies in the visualization of global processes. The campaign for the municipal elections was underway. Al Hajji was in difficulties. For the first time, I saw him try to avoid one of his responsibilities, in this case the management and the funding of the campaign of the President's party, the RDPC. He took the train to Yaoundé on his way to Paris together with several of his wives and his group of followers. He told the President that one of his wives was sick and needed to be operated upon urgently in Paris. A couple of days later he returned by train to Ngaoundéré. People claim that the President ordered him back to assume his responsibilities in the campaign. Adamaoua is the province in Cameroon that has the greatest number of opponents to the President and his party.

Many things have happened lately. Al Hajji is no longer chairman and proprietor of the majority of shares in the big companies in Douala, Yaoundé and Fombot. Many critical newspaper articles are being published about Al Hajji, for the first time in my experience. In the past, whenever critical voices were heard regarding Al Hajji, a horde of journalists arrived at his house with orders to write articles of praise about his pioneering role in Cameroon. Now, in a recent interview, Al Hajji made fun of a younger opposition politician in the party; a Mbum politician, highly educated, who lately has achieved much local success. He has obtained widespread support among local groups in the RDPC and is now a threat to Al Hajji's Fulbe candidates in the elections. Arrogantly, Al Hajji calls him a 'petit fonctionnaire' whom he can easily eliminate. Cameroonian intellectuals publish articles daily on this fight for power in the party. Never had I seen writings so critical of Al Hajji. Apparently, Al Hajji does not have full control anymore, the control of dynamics touching upon his image in the new open sphere. He is accustomed to possessing the money and power to control these political processes. What will happen?

View from Al Hajji's sitting room to the women' quarter

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View of the mosque and the *jawleeru* of the palace

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The mosque at sunset (Holtedahl 2002)

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In this study, we are dealing with complex local, national and international dynamics. I think, however, that I am able to identify some of the decisive ones. When Al Hajji moved into his palace in 2006, he invited all the directors from his industries, from Europe, the US and Cameroon, to a board meeting in the palace in Ngaoundéré – instead of, as usual, in Paris. Rumors circulated about how uncomfortable the board members were, mostly the white men, when they saw how they were themselves involved in the construction of such an extravagant palace in such a terribly poor and marginal area.

A few months after the board meeting, Al Hajji was informed that he would not be able to continue as chairman of his industries in Cameroon. He was asked to sell his shares. Apparently, he had lost his influence in relation to the President and the political system. He might still be rich, but certainly not powerful anymore.

A lion merits a bigger house than a rabbit. Most people agree to that. But this is not supposed to be visible to everyone in Africa and Europe today. Al Hajji's palace represents a visualization of power relations between the West and Africa, between the President and the Muslim Northern Cameroon. While Al Hajji constructed his palace, many stories were produced about the simple but intelligent upstart in Northern Cameroon. The political authorities do not sense the danger. They do not foresee the political complications that such an immense and spectacular palace in such a poor area may provoke. Perhaps the heads of the French agro-industrial companies were not expected to be made to feel uneasy confronted by a Versailles in Ngaoundéré. Most of the money normally remains invisible in small tax havens. They do not feel happy about my project, and I am asked by diplomatic authorities from the West not to continue my work on the film.

My work as an applied visual anthropologist acting in an international open, 'public' sphere might be seen by heads of Western and Northern industrial companies as a potential threat. Perhaps it is not desirable that a film about a ten year-long construction project on an African Versailles in Cameroon should be screened in the cinemas in the West. A screening might not only make local people criticize Al Hajji. People in the West might also criticize the Western companies.

### **Conclusion**

I have tried to show why and how changes in people's visual expression of social differences take place. These changes offer to us possibilities to uncover, describe, understand and explain the relative power of definition. By uncovering exclusion and inclusion mechanisms, one also identifies empowerment and pauperization as processes. Stepwise, we identify the systems of meaning, the time of generation, and find the experience spaces

that individual actors carry around. The experience spaces are constructed continuously through people's interactions and negotiations. In the ongoing processes of globalization, the concrete constructions and integration of social persons are under pressure from dynamics of social fields of different weight and scale. The experience spaces are connected into differently composed social identities, into repertoires of persons as cultural formation (Rudie 2008).

When the researcher tries to identify these determinants of the persons s/he finds the relative relevance of the fields of gender, nation, region, locality, religion, ethnicity, colour of skin, richness and poverty, etc., as these are expressed in people's emotions when they relate to each other. By scrutinizing minutely why people are happy, angry, hurt or ashamed, one may thus build explanations about the influence of social, economic and political dynamics on people's identities and viability as they develop in the globalizing-localizing processes.

In my search for the qualities of emergent arenas and social spheres, I focussed on the interface of global and local dynamics by following two men whose power was threatened. Where do the local powers of definition end and where do the global ones start? I have tried to answer the question about the eventual emergence of a public sphere in Africa by analytically distinguishing personal space and experience from social arenas and public spheres:

- (a) First, I see the person as having an incorporated practice (inherited from generations) that is expressed in the 'experience room', the space, that the person himself/herself defines (his/her organization of his/her relation in space to others). These organizational principles are institutionalized into rules of access, of inclusion and of exclusion of others.
- (b) Next, I try to identify the scenes where socially defined arenas are created by different people and that may be institutionalized, either shallowly or deeply. This concerns the definitions of rules of events and activities, actors and roles, and exclusion or inclusion of actors.
- (c) There is also the sphere that is a configuration of numerous arenas that again encompasses many people's space enactment. Several events in several arenas may be taking place and articulate within a sphere in what Grønhaug calls an *eigendynamik*. A sphere is then also institutionalized as a defined place and space for events, activities regulating rights and duties (among other things, of access) to actors. The boundaries between spheres may follow the walls of the palaces, i.e. be the manifestation of the separate worlds of men and women, and their encounters. Spheres may also cross gender boundaries, or ethnic and other culturally defined boundaries.

- (d) Last, a public sphere eventually implies qualities of open, equal access and participation of possible actors, as ideally in public assemblies, markets and streets.

In this article, I have relegated the notion of 'public' to an epiphenomenon – something that may be generated and that we may discover in our empirical material. I do not use 'public sphere' as an analytically defined substantial thing that can be found and that should look like what is thought of as 'public' as opposed to private in Western sociological thinking.

Against the background of the material I have presented, it is difficult for me to say whether some people in Ngaoundéré share an idea about what we think of as a 'public sphere'. I would say that some spheres of an apparently new and open kind are in the making. I find these openings of access to arenas in my characters' movements and efforts to defend their dignity and power in the face of changing surroundings in the North as well as the South. In their everyday social relations, however, I do not find clearly defined shared notions of a new public sphere in the Western sense.

My focus is not on representatives of state, bureaucratic institutions, common, 'public' places such as markets and streets. I have tried to track changes in the practices of two persons who are very closely related to tradition, all the while they are exposed to violent change that challenges their identity. A supposed 'public instance' like a taxi firm in Paris is not experienced as public to an African. All the time barriers are negotiated; between the whites and the Africans, between the leaders in the North and the South, between Sultan and subordinates and between industrialist and subordinates. New rules organizing persons, roles/identities, space, arenas, and spheres into new hierarchies are arising as a consequence of globalization and state building.

Sultan Issa Maigari had to work hard to keep a minimum of respect when the different roots of power were progressively eliminated by the state. In the local context, he partly succeeded with his project: to create new roots of power. The film project, the film team, the film about him is in itself one of these roots. His subjects in Ngaoundéré observed all this. When he visited Norway, he felt humiliated when he applied his own criteria of power and respect. Al Hajji grew up in Ngaoundéré, and when he built his economic empire, he used all the idioms of a political leadership that had been connected throughout a long time to local leadership, i.e., the one of the Sultanate. He has servants and a court. Members of his court use the traditional, physical or visual behaviours when they relate to Al Hajji. The Sultan and Al Hajji as persons of cultural formation are both 'big men' with many subjects. Their economic, political and social activities promote transformation of access rules to arenas/spheres.

My analysis has shown that they manage to create new sources of power – and how they retain the power of definition of local/global access rules. We also see how and when they lose their power of definition. And we see how Western socioeconomic dynamics, in the end through the President and RDPC, put pressure on and control their positions and possibilities. I myself as anthropologist also actively contribute to the overall transformation processes by my marginalization as a woman, my ‘promotion’ as white and by becoming a threat as anthropologist.

My material illustrates how the differentiation between rich and poor, or the powerful and poor, takes place. As long as Al Hajji had control of money he dominated many important local dynamics. Progressively, the visualization of power through Al Hajji’s palace (and my contribution through the filming) articulated with the upcoming new elites of the marginalized Mbum community in putting pressure on his position, identity and powers of definition. The same behaviours, the Sultan’s and Al Hajji’s, are rooted very differently in local and global contexts. The Sultan’s power is inherited and has continuously to be saved through innovative initiatives. Al Hajji enjoyed the power of an upstart. It was rooted in wealth. His position as local leader was assured through the use of traditional local idioms and progressive incorporation of new idioms very differently in the local and global contexts.

Who are the actors and what are the fields that generate their loss of power? These actors become visible because their acts provoke doubt about the systems of meaning and the idioms they use. The Governor does not kneel in front of the Sultan. He represents the state. Norwegians who have not been to Cameroon do not know how to behave towards Sultans. They do not bother either. Peter does not accept the rules of behaviour towards Al Hajji that Al Hajji’s own behaviour has helped to produce locally. For the European architect, there is simply an economic interest in designing a large palace. He also considers that his working in Muslim Cameroon necessitates ‘educating’ a local ‘arriviste’ to become sufficiently civilized to be worth the architecture he, a Western architect, offers.

Peter also represents the Western societies in which Al Hajji’s economic empire is anchored. Peter’s disdain for Al Hajji might be one of the generators of Al Hajji’s enormous palace. In order not to lose dignity, Al Hajji has to convince local people that Peter’s deplorable behaviour does not create doubt about his power. He is a lion. A very big, partly Western, partly oriental, partly local palace may serve to convince the locals.

I hope to have shown how a kind of political correctness in Western academia, a concentration on research on poor people, may seem to be too narrow if one wants to understand poor people’s conditions. If we work



with powerful and rich people we learn important things about poverty. In my projects I acquire an insight into the helplessness of the Sultan and of Al Hajji. I feel empathy. I also learn the perspectives of their subjects and their knowledge about the big men's efforts to cover and hide their fragility. When the less legitimate arrangements of economic and political collaboration, for example Al Hajji's many import and export monopolies, literally became visible to people in Cameroon and the West, i.e. to Al Hajji's partners in the West, efforts are made to marginalize him. Al Hajji's immense palace constitutes a visualization of the 'corrupts' (white men) corrupting of the black elites.

Our continuously shared reflections – between my informants and me – about cultural codes and about the Sultan's and Al Hajji's supportive and oppressive strategies respectively, are developed as a consequence of my filming. The reflections provoke a new knowledge for them and for me. I learn how Al Hajji tries to please the poor. I also learn to differentiate the efforts of all of them to put entirely new questions on the agenda. The local population that has not been to school just has to guess where the money comes from. At the end, Al Hajji's sayings become law. Many people believe that to deal with politics equals fetching money on Al Hajji's carpet. Al Hajji lectures daily about politics. Politics is solidarity, communality, he says. It is not salaried work. But it is in vain. Since he pays them to gather votes, they do not change their attitude to politics. Money reigns.

The use of film and people's participation in the transformation processes that my presence and filming generate expresses the applied aspect of my research methodology. My presence allows the poor people on Al Hajji's carpet to participate in dialogues with the powerful. The camera, so to speak, pushes the aspect of public sphere, the public audience, onto the people on the carpet. The research with a camera also strengthens the 'small people's' and my own opportunity to see the efforts of the powerful people to protect their own power and to define new rules in the different new local arenas.

I found dynamic changes in local Muslim milieus in Ngaoundéré town. I have looked at changes from the point of view of an anthropologist, who tried to identify how specific social, economic and religious dynamics produce new social persons as cultural formation in articulation with the inscribed and incorporated practices shaped by generation and time, and who has her own generational time, as it has developed through many visits to Ngaoundéré during 30 years.

I have tried to analyze two important local characters through time as bearers of incorporated cultural knowledge in order to scrutinize how rules of access to arenas are defined and redefined; the characters' space and redefinitions of their own space as it evolved in daily life. Herein, I have

found a series of new institutionalized open spheres with varying rules of access, different cards distributed to the players. The cards have come into being through pressures on local interactions from the processes of globalization as they are refracted through global and national economics, politics and Islam. The social persons are characterized by strongly incorporated hierarchies that the actors reinforce to keep their power. These dynamics induce them to resist the challenge from new bureaucratic and state-based hierarchies. We also see that global dynamics, here especially the economic ones, seem to consolidate new hierarchical forms of the local community and of the rules of arenas and spheres. The arenas and spheres I find may be open to many but they are not accessible to all. They are mainly open to Muslim men and male Christian political authorities.

### Notes

1. I have worked since 1970 in West Africa. I did my first fieldwork in Eastern Niger in 1970, and have worked in Mali in the 1990s and in Cameroon since 1980.
2. I prefer to use open and closed, domestic/intimate instead of Habermas's 'public' and 'private' to avoid a generalised, ideal and occidental understanding when I try to explore my material from Northern Cameroon.
3. 'Lamiido' (sing.), 'lamiibe' (plur.) in Fulfulde.
4. Pullo (sing.), Fulbe (plur.) is the indigenous name of the Fulani (English) and Peul (French) ethnic group.
5. The difference between open and public: 'open' means access for many people not necessarily all; 'public' implies a theoretically democratic societal organization of access for all members of society.
6. A social space is what a social actor defines (implicitly or explicitly) as behavioural rules of his and partners' participation in interaction in a specific situation, Rudie 1974.
7. David MacDougall's ethnographic films, *Under the Men's Tree* and *Takeover* are strong visual expressions of the management by local male groups of collective interests and of how violently regional, national African, or Australian authorities reject them (MacDougall 1974 and 1980). Goody has described how literacy has led to ruptures in social networks and solidarity (Goody 1963 and 1977).
8. Jean Rouch has documented very well such processes following from industrialization and migration in West Africa in *Les Maîtres fous*. Labour migrants collectively manipulate the symbols of the colonial powers in ritual gatherings in Niamey, Niger (Rouch 1954). Their messages, however, did not have an important outreach. Clyde Mitchell describes and analyses similar processes in his article 'The Kalela Dance' (Mitchell 1956).
9. This may also be seen as tacit or explicit expression of political interests as contained in CODESRIA's call for papers on the subject here considered.

10. The exposition was also shown at the Ethnographic Museum, Oslo, Norway, in 1972, and at the National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1973.
11. See CODESRIA's call for papers, 2008, 'The scientific vocation of the researcher has been defined from one generation to another as including a commitment to a social project with transformatory potentials'.
12. Al Hajji, (origin, *haj*, Arabic) title attributed by all Muslims to men having travelled on pilgrimage to Mecca.
13. Rassemblements démocratiques des populations du Cameroun.
14. Njamdji is the name of a minor ethnic group very much stigmatized by the Fulbe.
15. Singular, jawleeru, pluriel jawleeji, local Fulfulde term.
16. Fulfulde for 'I have come out', i.e. I have become accessible.
17. Groups that are not Muslim often organize their social space and open arenas in fundamentally different ways from the Muslim population. In 1982 I found in the Joli Soir quarter of Ngaoundéré that nearly every aspect of personal everyday life is exposed on the street: washing the nearly naked body, dishes and clothes; eating, quarrelling, flirting, discussions, crises, etc. (See Eidheim 1972.) In the Muslim quarters however one only sees people walking along the streets or sitting talking (Waage 2003). Everything else happens behind the walls.
18. Debbo teaado (sing.), rewbe teaabe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
19. Sullaado (sing.), sullaabe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
20. Kaado (sing.), horbe (plur.) in Fulfulde.
21. I think here not only of modern forms of orientalism and exoticism that transform Muslim Sultans into very interesting objects, but also of the national policy of stressing the folklore aspect of traditional political leaders.
22. 'The Consequences of Literacy', Goody 1968.
23. There are very important Diasporas in Douala and Yaoundé and other cities in Southern, Central, Western and Eastern Cameroon.
24. A subgroup of the Wodaabe.
25. The late father Henri Bocquené who worked among the Mbororos of Eastern Adamaoua introduced me to him when I started fieldwork in Cameroon.
26. Jean Boutrais in a personal communication in 1999 about the severe decline in fertility rates in the village of Dibi.
27. As a result of the work of Protestant mission schools the literacy level of the Gbaya and Ndiï grew from 1924. The Mbum did not convert to Christianity and only recently has conversion to Islam taken place.
28. In the 1990s the Mbum language was still the dominant language in the palace.
29. Ngaoundéré is Mbum: 'ngaou' means 'mountain', 'ndere', 'navel'.
30. Mbum title for centralized political leadership.
31. The 'jawleeji', reception halls, and the 'kiita', the courthouse where the traditional court is held several times a week.
32. The main entrance hall and male quarters in front of the mosque at the right; the female quarters with garden and trees behind.

33. Maccudo (sing.) Fulfulde: male slave.
34. From 'wurtugo', Fulfulde: to come out.
35. 'We are only decorations in the palace!' (Holtedahl 1993).
36. Arab urban gender traditions may also have been influential through Islam (see Abu Lugod, Geerts).
37. Cameroon's first president, a Pullo from Garoua.
38. From the 1920s onwards American and Norwegian Protestant missionaries started their work in Adamaoua. The French Catholic Mission was established in the 1940s.
39. Al Hajji, from Arabic 'haj', the pilgrimage to Mecca, a title eagerly sought for by Muslim men and mostly acquired by the rich traders.
40. Faada (sing.), Fulfulde, for court or government.
41. Confirmed by Mahamadou Saliou, historian and son of the Bellaka of Nganha in 2009.
42. Kiita, Fulfulde: court; tribunal traditional: French.
43. And would have had the same effect on a Bellaka.
44. Griot, French; bambaado (sing.) Fulfulde: scald.
45. Lesdi, earth, and nasaara, Fulfulde: the white man's territory.
46. The Norwegian capital.
47. Gandura, Fulfulde: male kaftan.
48. Walkiiri, Hausa and Fulfulde: Minister of international affairs.
49. Sarkin njiwa: the elephant king (sarki, Hausa for king, njiwa, Fulfulde: elephant). The scalds always shout 'Sarkin njiwa! Sarkin Adamaoua!' to praise the Lamiido in Ngaoundéré. This is part of the important performances confirming the importance and power of the Sultan of Adamaoua.
50. Maiscam is the first and only intensive industrial production of corn and soya in Adamaoua. The corn is used for beer production at the national brewery, for oil for cooking, soya for oil, etc. After that Al Hajji built up a flour industry, a sugar and salt industry, and la Sacherie, in the Port of Douala. Large agricultural industrial companies in France are involved as are companies in the United States and Canada. Italian milling companies provide skilled personnel and industrial construction.
51. *Pulaaku* means shame in English. See Bocquené 1986, Labatut 1973, Dupire 1970, Riesman 1977, Stenning 1958, 1959.
52. Al Hajji repeatedly stated that he was not influenced by 'follie de grandeur'.
53. See Mary Douglas 1966.
54. See numerous articles in *Jeune Afrique*. Also Mbembe 1990, 1992, Bayart et al., 1992, Geschiere 1993, Rowlands 1993.
55. The Sultan speaks in Fulfulde about baleebe. In the francophone contexts that follows from industrialization the expression 'les noirs' is used.
56. Fulfulde: local, Muslim male coat.
57. Al Hajji uses the expression 'un Blanc', French for 'white person' (Fanon 1952).

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### Films

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