WOMEN IN BAMENDA
Survival Strategies and Access to Land

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WOMEN IN BAMENDA -

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND ACCESS TO LAND

Adri van den Berg
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PREFACE

The present report is a historical-anthropological study of the survival strategies of urban women in the town Bamenda, Cameroon, as far as they are related to changing access to land. The emphasis is on historical developments from the sixties on, during which period the commercialization and urbanisation of Bamenda has accelerated. In West Cameroon, extremely complex transactions and conflicts over land are witnessed. Due to the encroachment of the market economy, a huge population growth, commercialization of land and increasing state interventions, land is becoming scarce. A process of redistribution of land is taking place, leading to concentration of land within a few hands and increasing fragmentation of the customarily tended lands. In this report I will argue that large groups of women are threatened with marginalization as a result of their diminishing control of land.

This is a slightly abbreviated version of my M.A. thesis (1990), closing the study Social History at Erasmus University, Rotterdam. Revising and reducing the thesis obliged me to drop most of the theoretical and methodological accounts. I hope this will not hamper the understanding of this story of Bamenda women.

In the preparation and execution of this study I received considerable help and advice from my tutors, Prof. Dr. Peter Geschiere and Dr. Gerti Hesseling. In Cameroon, too, many government officials and researchers offered me help and co-operation. I am very grateful to all of them, most notably to: Mr. Cyprian Fisiy (ISH-Yaounde), Mr. Pius Soh (ISH-Bamenda), Mrs. Theresa Teh and Mr. Jah (Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs), Mr. Nsutebu (Ministry of Town Planning- Buea), Mr. Henry Mbaib (National Archives-Buea), the Senior District Officer in Bamenda and all staff members of the Mankon Customary Court.

I owe particular gratitude to all the women in Bamenda who granted me their stories, ideas and confidence. However often I returned, to sit in their compounds and ask thousands of questions, they were always gentle and patient with me. Some women were particularly interested and offered a great insight into their lives and strategies. It is my sincere hope that this report may contribute to a better understanding of their situation. To my dear partner Luc Houtkamp I owe too much to mention, but without his encouragement and support I would had given up this enterprise for ten times at least.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The relationship between African women and land has undergone serious changes during the past decades. By tradition, women's primary care for food and their indispensable labour gave them a strong spiritual and economical bond with the land. Women always had a certain access to land, under some conditions, in order to sustain their families. This access to land is being diminished and restricted, due to economic and political processes. Especially the women in towns are facing considerable difficulties in feeding their families.

"Agricultural work is, of course, not common in an urban situation for either sex...One of the significant changes for many women who come to town is that they may lose their rights to agricultural land...Even indigenous women city-dwellers are often in a similar situation; their lands were either lost or sold in the immense growth of towns during the colonial period, the proceeds going mainly to male lineage members. Women are nevertheless expected to feed their families. If they cannot grow the food, they must earn money to buy it or become dependent on their husbands for that money." (Robertson, 1984: 43, my emphasis).

Claire Robertson's remarks present, in a nutshell, the dilemmas these women have to face. A constant appeal to the patriarchal ideology, and the traditional division of roles (and often simply absence of male support) makes the vast majority of women responsible for the food supply. Basically, every woman will try to cultivate family food wholly or partly to push down the costs of living. If they do not succeed they will look for other ways to earn money. Uneducated women are usually destined to work in the informal sector.

1.1. Outline of the report

Since land, along with labour, is the most important economic resource in a subsistence economy I will focus in this study on women's access to land (without omitting alternatives such as trade and formal employment). I wish to inquire into the present importance of land as a source of income to women, and to examine the alternatives that are developed in situations of land shortage, such as in a densely populated quarter of Bamenda-Town. Although theoretically urban women have more economic sources at their disposal than just land (such as trade or formal employment), various ideological and socio-economic forces seem to co-operate in preventing them from exploiting these sources to the full. I will examine these obstructive factors and look into the strategies adopted by women to acquire access to
economic sources. For this purpose, I will compare the situation of "big" business women to that of small women-traders in Bamenda.

One of women's strategies is to start a court action to defend or claim their rights to land. The scarcer the land, the more conflicts there are, and consequently the more women are involved in those conflicts. In order to understand the character of their conflicts I will pay special attention to the developments of legal pluralistic land tenure systems in Western Cameroon and the specific land rights of women. The interaction between customary institutions and the legal interventions of the successive Cameroonian governments as regards to land will be discussed in detail.

1.2. The research area.

The Central Highlands in the Northwest of Cameroon, also known as the Grassfields, are a chain of green hills, and rather fertile plateaus which extend from Widekum in the West as far as the Northeastern savannah plains around Foumban. It is an open, accessible area which had offered much freedom of movement both to migrating peoples, nomads and foreigners in the past. Consequently, the Grassfields were subject to numerous migration movements and social changes. The region comprised large kingdoms (Nso, Bamoun), small city-states (Bali, Bafut), and autonomous villages (see map). At present it is one of the most densely populated areas in Cameroon with an average of 100-150 inhabitants per km² (Van den Boorn, 1984)¹. The southern part of the Grassfields, the Bamenda Plateau, lies 1100-1300 metres above sea level and is surrounded by a volcanic mountain range with peaks of 2000 to 2600 metres high. In the plains numerous crater lakes and waterfalls can be found. The land on the mountains around Bamenda is rather fertile but the lower plains, on which most of the city is built, consist mainly of loam and infertile clay. The city of Bamenda was founded by the Germans when they constructed garrison and government buildings on the edge of the plateau in 1902 (now generally known as "up-station"). The lowlands, which the colonial administrators overlooked from their offices, gradually became a place of residence for indigenous traders and workers who were attracted by the demand for goods and services by the Europeans. This first settlement, called "Abakpa" but nowadays

¹ The most recent census (1987) in the North-West Province gives an average population density of 71.2 /km² (total population 1,239,164 on a surface of 17,409 km² - data from Lopez-Escartin, 1991).
CAMEROON AND THE GRASSFIELDS

source: J.P. Warnier, 1985
known as "Old Town", extended to the district capital Bamenda with at present approximately 110,000 inhabitants (Lopez-Escartin, 1991). The cities in Cameroon are growing at an average rate of 7.4% per year (Van den Boorn, 1984), which brought the total number of city-dwellers in 1982 to 33.3% of the total population and will bring to an estimated 55% in the year 2000.

Just as varied as the physical characteristics of Cameroon is its political history. Cameroon comprises more than 200 languages and a variety of population groups, of varying sizes and forms of organization, and was created as a state by colonial conquest. From the end of the 19th century it was colonized by the Germans for 25 years, and after their defeat in 1916 the colony was divided into a French and a British trust territory, gaining independence after 1961 (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974). West-Cameroon was ruled as a province of Nigeria by the British under mandate of the League of Nations (later U.N.) from 1922 on. The majority of what is now called Cameroon came under French rule. Only after the independence of both the western and the eastern part of Cameroon were these two parts reunited, at first federatively in 1961 and after 1972 as a united state2.

Thanks to the cool climate, the Grassfields are among to the most fertile regions of West Africa (Kaberry, 1952) and have a large production capacity. Maize is now the most important food crop, followed by potatoes, bananas and groundnuts. Arabica coffee is the most important agricultural export product of the region, followed by vegetables and fruit. The Cameroonian government seeks to develop the area as the "bread basket of the nation" as part of the national self-supporting policy. For this purpose a new land legislation was introduced in 1974, which was supposed to stimulate agricultural developments and give individuals more rights to land.

For some decades, Cameroon experienced a gradual economic growth (between 1977-1982 7% per year- Van den Boorn, 1984), pushing the country’s income above the average income of sub-Saharan Africa. Since a number of years,

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2 President Ahidjo was Head of State until 1982, when he was succeeded by President Paul Biya. At the moment of writing, the political scene was dominated by the united party C.P.D.M., Cameroon People's Democratic Movement. However, pressed by people's demonstrations and riots, the government proclaimed multi-partyism on December 2nd 1990.
however, Cameroon has been suffering from a serious economic and political crisis which affects all economic participants severely, including those in the informal sector.

1.3. Land tenure debate

In studies on African land tenure researchers tend to conceive land primarily as an inalienable asset of the community and as an indispensable element of cohesion within social relations (Elias, 1954/ Melone, 1971/ Kouassigan, 1982). Individual rights to land, in this view, have a restricted, temporary, and relative character, bedded into a hierarchy of rights (chief - lineage head - family head - individual). For some time now, a discussion has been going on concerning the nature and possible communal characteristics of African land tenure, and concerning the alleged opposition between individual and collective rights to land.3

This ethnocentric myth of the organic, closed pre-colonial society has been severely criticized by contemporary research into the variety of land tenure4. Moreover, the concept of "property" is rejected, being part of the civil-Roman paradigm (the right to use and dispose of land) which is not suitable to West-Africa. Instead, the concept of "security of rights to land" is useful, because this does more justice to the variability of social relations as the basis of land tenure. Land was never exclusively owned communally, but always in relation to individual rights. Also the inalienability of land was not absolute, but only in relation to foreigners ("inexotransmissibilité" - Le Roy & Le Bris, 1982). Circulation of rights to land was a crucial means in the domestic mode of production. It is not so much a question of hierarchy in rights but rather of a bundle of rights, consisting

3 See for example the debate between Bohannan (1963) and Gluckman (1969). For a review see e.g. Le Roy (1982) and Bruce (1988). Thus, Gluckman (1969) started out from the idea that every level in the social hierarchy had a certain "estate of administration". The primary estate originated from the authority and duties of the chief, whereas secondary, more restricted estates were granted to family heads, and tertiary, usufructuary estates to individuals. In my opinion Gluckman does not adequately meet this last level, because of the great variety in land rights, tenure and destination of a specific piece of land by individuals.

4 Leading research centres on this subject are the Land Tenure Centre, USA and l'APREFA, Paris. For a general conceptual overview of these research networks, see Dickerman (1987), Le Bris et al. (1982), Crousse et al. (1986).
of different forms of rights to land, exercised by persons and groups on different types of lands in different periods for specified aims. For example, rights to land for cash crop production differ strongly from those to subsistence land; in semi-arid areas certain lands are used in the dry season by cattle holders and in the wet season by food cultivators. Moreover, people holding rights to land may differ from those who hold rights to trees on that land and, again, from those who are entitled to reap the fruits of those trees.

At least four types of rights can be distinguished, ranging from rights of use (exploitation), transfer, allocation, and administration, "all of which may or may not coincide in the hands of a single individual or group" (Reyna & Downs, 1988: 14). Different individuals or groups may lay conflicting legitimate claims to the same plot (for example: a family elder or a son of the deceased). These conflicts occurred frequently in indigenous tenure (Berry, 1988). In Chapter Four I will further elaborate on these themes.

Women's customary access to and control of land is connected with marital and family rules. Family rules are aimed at conserving family property and exogamous, patrilineal (in most Cameroonian societies) marriages. Unequal power relations on village and household levels, however, are more important in shaping local land tenure practices (Jones, 1981/ Davison, 1988). Several studies⁵ have pointed to the necessity of analyzing the unequal access to land within the household.⁶ These unequal power relations are part of a process of stratification, as the following paragraph makes clear.

1.4. Gender and stratification

Research on the Grassfields by Miriam Goheen (1989) suggests that, despite women's dominant role in the subsistence economy, their access to economic

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6 These unequal relations to land have been characterized by Davison as part of the "gender production relations", defined as "...socio-economic relations between females and males that are characterized often by differential assignment of labour tasks, control over decision-making, and differential access to and control over the allocation of resources - including land and income." (Davison, 1988:3) Gender production relations are not restricted to the household level, but lie at the basis of the entire society: household, village, and state.
sources (land, labour, capital) has decreased strongly in comparison with men's. Access to land seems to be concentrated more and more in the hands of an elite group of 'Big Men'. According to Goheen, a process of stratification between the uneducated village farmer and the educated wealthy farmer is taking place in the Nso region. Wives of poor farmers have to walk many more miles to reach their lands, have to work harder and have more "male" expenses such as school fees. In the wealthier households, however, servants can be employed to relieve the wives from their chores, enabling them to set up a business of their own. They are becoming Big Women. Goheen sees a larger gap being created between women who have good access to education, various economic sources and political structures of power, and women who are not able to gain this access (Goheen, 1989: 5). This socio-economic process is alternatively denoted as marginalization and stratification.

Stratification is the process whereby the gaps between certain social groups are growing wider and wider; in which the upper-class increasingly gains more economic possibilities whereas the other groups are in danger of marginalization. Marginalization commonly refers to a specific process of withdrawal from the market economy towards its periphery - the informal sector in which the people involved experience a growing social insecurity (Baks, 1985, mentioned in Grijns, 1986).

Grijns has refined the notion of marginalization by shifting the emphasis from loss of wage labour to decreased access to the various means of livelihood, thereby making it applicable to changes within the informal sector (instead of the transition from the formal to the informal sector). She also stresses that a relative loss of sources, that is sources which are taken over by other groups, increases the differences between these groups even further. This relative loss of sources may be affected by ideological valuation of breadwinner roles which in turn may be affected by governmental measures.

Grijns finally defines marginalization as a process

"in which a certain group of people loses access to their means of existence because these pass into the hands of another group of people without them gaining access to alternative means. Depending on their responsibility for others and the safety-net they can fall back on, this may lead to social insecurity." (Grijns, 1986: 68, my translation)

Several books have recently been published on these stratification processes (e.g. Fisiy, 1986/Goheen, 1989) which however tend to focus on rural male family heads and land owners. Mope Simo (1989) and Goheen have undertaken
research into stratification among rural women, but the question of stratification among urban women has been left unanswered as yet. Moreover, Goheen approaches the position of women as deriving from the social status of their husbands, and thus does not take into account possible contradictions and conflicts within households which, in my opinion, derive from unequal gender-based power relations within the households (see also Stichter & Hay, 1984/ Guyer, 1984). African women have their own responsibilities and strategies, independent from those of men (Robertson, 1984), which is why I wish to approach women's activities and statuses as an autonomous entity and not as deriving from men (fathers, husbands, sons).

I will follow the hypothesis that, due to processes of urbanisation and commercialization, women's customary rights to land are being increasingly restricted. This is not sufficiently compensated for by private land ownership, nor by any other economic resource. As a result of this process women are threatened with marginalization. This hypothesis will be worked out in the following chapters on the basis of three aspects which determine women's chances of marginalization in a complex interaction:
1. Changes in access to land, commerce and capital
2. Women's various responsibilities for the family
3. The "social safety-net" of financial support from others.

Finally I would like to point out that using the concept of "marginalization" easily implies regarding women as victims, which leaves little room for the individually active woman. The concept suggests that women end up on the margins of society where they await their destiny meekly. I will try to avoid such victimization by emphasizing women's endeavours to gain economic independence and their survival strategies. Again, I would like to stress that the danger of marginalization is not the same in all groups of women, not even among those who work in the informal sector. Even within this sector there are considerable differences, as I hope to demonstrate in the following chapters.

1.5. Research methods

Besides preliminary literature research I have also made use of the following methods and techniques for my research:
A. Source research in the colonial administrative records of the National Archives in Buea (Southwest Cameroon).


C. Survey of and interviews with women in the Old Town quarter of Bamenda

D. Interviews with officials, politicians and business-women in Bamenda. I spoke with a number of departmental and provincial officials and politicians about state politics with regard to women, urbanisation and land. An account of these conversations is given in Chapter Five.

E. A study of government reports, policy documents and law-books. These documents relate for the most part to the recent years.

In every chapter I will indicate which sources were used, and which problems they presented.

1.6. Organization of the report

By way of a historical introduction, Chapter Two deals with the formation and growth of the city of Bamenda, discussing aspects of migration, colonization, urbanisation, and stratification. It also presents a case-study of the Old Town quarter: the location of my research.

Chapter Three concentrates on the position of women in Bamenda and especially in Old Town. On the basis of women's case histories I will outline some of the problems they encounter in their struggle for economic survival. I will elaborate on the aspects of family networks, access to land, and commerce, and place them within a broader social scope.

Chapter Four deals entirely with developments in land tenure and with women's relation to land. The increasing interference of the state in local tenure and conflicts over land will also be discussed. The records of the Customary Court, which attended to land conflicts before 1974, serve as an illustration of women's problems and strategies with regard to land.

In the final chapter I will attempt to draw some conclusions with regard to the changing access to land and its consequences for women. I will also indicate a few alternative strategies women have, and give some recommendations which might help to improve their economic situation.
CHAPTER TWO: THE GENESIS OF BAMENDA

Entering the Grassfields for the first time from the direction of Bafoussam, one immediately notices the green plains and hills, fully planted with coffee and food crops. Just past the sign "Bamenda" one catches sight of a European fortress, complete with cannons and ramparts and overgrown with weeds. Then the road twists downwards along a steep descent into the valley, to the corrugated iron roofed town of Bamenda.

The strategic view of this same valley, which must have struck the German colonizers as much as it strikes travellers nowadays (although the valley is much more densely populated now), made them decide in 1902 to build their military fortress on the promontory. This fortress was the first impulse to the present town of Bamenda (see map).

Bamenda is a colonial creation on Mankon, Nkwen, and Mendankwe territory, and expanded from an administrative post via the Hausa settlement Abakpa to a medium-sized semi-urban town of approximately 110,000 inhabitants. This growth was due primarily to the massive flow of migrants who were attracted from far and wide by this junction of commerce and service industry. Bamenda was the only town in the North West Province until the 1970s and still is the fastest-growing and biggest one of this province (Gwan, 1982).

Nowadays, it is a bustling town full of commerce, services, public and private enterprises, and industry. There is no large-scaled industrial activity but there are numerous production and repair workshops. The market, the number of schools, government institutions and so forth, situated mostly in the city-centre, serve the entire North West Province. The old centre of town is densely populated and consists of loam or cement houses, with small strips of land in between for vegetables and maize. The peripheral districts have a more rural character, with scattered houses and large plots on which coffee and food crops are cultivated.

This chapter, presenting a historical background to the processes and events I will describe in the next two chapters, is structured as follows. First, I will sketch the origins of Bamenda Town, and some aspects of urbanization and migration. This is followed by a discussion of the current situation in Bamenda, and especially in Old Town (sections 2.1 and 2.2.). In order to understand the processes of urbanization and social stratification in Bamenda and to contextualize indigenous land tenure systems, it is necessary to pay
some attention to the various population groups in the area. The second part of this chapter, therefore, will deal with the history and socio-political institutions of the Mankon people, on whose land most of the town has been built (2.3.), as well as with colonial developments in Bamenda and processes of state formation in Cameroon. The latter two aspects in particular are essential for an understanding of the impact of land legislation of the respective colonial and independent governments (which will be treated in Chapter Four). Thus, in section 2.4. I will present an overview of the process of colonization, and of the administrative trials and tribulations in the Bamenda Division: a story of jealousy, corruption, and rifts.
2.1 Bamenda-Abakpa-Old Town

In general it is fair to state that little is known about urbanization processes in Cameroon, with the exception of Douala (see Mainet, 1983/Champaud, 1983). The colonial officials focused on traditional rural societies, rather than on the newly rising towns. The pre-colonial history of west-Cameroon and the Grassfields in particular is a complicated and largely unwritten story. Although many oral traditions along with the genealogies, places of origin, and migration movements of most population groups have been recorded, their reliability is open to question. Oral tradition might be mixed with current interests, as the anthropologists Chilver and Kaberry have remarked: "oral traditions reflect the alliances and enmities of this period as well as an earlier mythical layer" (1967: 20). Thus most of the less-stratifiedchiefsdoms claim to originate from the Widekum area west of Bamenda, whereas the highly stratified kingdoms are supposed to have moved from Tikar (North-East of Bamenda) to the Grassfields. Both claims appear to concern the nature and origin of their alliances rather than their migration movements, according to Warnier (1985).”

For the reconstruction of Bamenda’s history of urbanisation I have drawn primarily on the British National Archives at Buea, supplemented with some oral history interviews. Unfortunately, the Archives do not contain documents pertaining to the last two decades. One of the greatest problems in using colonial sources is their lack of objectivity. Most records refer to administrative disorder and reorganisations. There are some ethnographic reports from the twenties and thirties, which we have to handle with great care, however, because of their ethnocentric bias. This research into the records yielded some information on colonial land politics and the historical development of Bamenda, but provided very little information on the

7 Especially P. Kaberry conducted a valuable study in the forties in tracing oral history. On the basis of these data she and E. Chilver compiled the book *Traditional Bamenda, the pre-colonial history of the Bamenda Grassfields* (1967), laying the basis for a new generation of historians (e.g. Eyongetah & Brain, 1974). P. Nkwi and J. Warnier (1976 and 1975/1985 respectively) introduced a new dimension to the historiography of the Grassfields. Together they published a popularized treatise entitled *Elements for a history of the Western Grassfields* (1982). Their contribution is new in the sense that they use linguistic and archaeological material in addition to oral tradition. This can provoke an interesting debate on origins (which cannot be dealt with here).
practicalities of land acquisition and women's economic activities. For these topics I had to turn to interviews with the people involved.

The archival research into the genesis of Bamenda sometimes produced complicated and confusing results. First of all, the various peoples were referred to by different names during the colonial period. Secondly, the British government initially pursued a policy of centralization, then of decentralization. Thirdly, Bamenda is situated in the territory of three peoples: Abakpa and surrounding quarters are on Mankon territory (formerly known as Bande), a distinct part belongs to the Nkwen (formerly known as Bafreng), and the government buildings ('Station') on top of the Bambuto Mountains are on Mendankwe territory. Fourthly, these peoples were ruled by various Native Authorities (according to their alleged origin). Mankon was rated among the Ngemba group (a branch of the Widekum tradition). Nkwen and Mendankwe were ranked in the Tikar group, and were incorporated into the Bafut Native Authority immediately after the introduction of Indirect Rule.

In order to reconstruct the history of Bamenda one ought to follow the administrative developments of these three peoples, all the more because Bamenda did not have its own administrative body until 1964. However, because Abakpa was quite soon ranked among the Ngemba Native Authority, this last administration will receive the most emphasis.

2.1.1. The origins of Bamenda

Since the sixties and seventies of the previous century, the Grassfields were visited regularly by nomadic Hausa traders to sell kola nuts, among other things (Chilver, 1977). At the beginning of this century the Hausa were seeking a place of residence from which they could easily reach the sources of their trade, and they settled on a hill in Mendankwe behind the new German "Station". This administrative post was populated by soldiers and officers and was supplied by the Hausa traders in the area.

In 1922, after the British conquest of the area, a group of fifty Hausa were allocated an uninhabited and thickly wooded piece of land at the foot of the mountain to settle on. The land was given by the British, but had customarily been administrated by the leader (Fon) of the Mankon. This first Hausa settlement developed into the quarter of "Abakpa", which means "marketplace" in Hausa. The Hausa leader, titled Sariki, was granted authority by the
colonial administration to govern Abakpa, to allocate land, and to collect taxes. Even non-Hausa who wanted to settle in Abakpa had to ask the Sariki for land, according to my informants. The land around Abakpa, which was ruled by the Fon of Mankon, became part of this settlement and was later on used for farming, and for urban expansion. Since the Hausa did not cultivate the land themselves but bought their food in surrounding villages (or hired female farmers to work on their land), their settlement soon attracted farmers and food traders from other villages.

Besides the Hausa's economic activities, employment by the British administration also attracted a lot of immigrants (interpreters, clerks, porters, farmers, traders of whom many came from outside the Grassfields such as Ibo and Fulani), all of whom settled in Abakpa. The anonymity of the new migrants' town was "a refuge for undesirables from most parts of the Division" (Ba 1942-3:6), and attracted many women too, during the fifties. Abakpa was already the most important trade centre in the western Grassfields in the thirties, although the number of inhabitants was only 1299 (Ab 25-1934). As a result of these commercial contacts an elite of prominent business people emerged. Among the eleven "Big Businessmen" who were active in Abakpa during the thirties and forties, there is mention of one woman (Soh, 1083: 24). Another group with flourishing business was that of the female food and drink sellers. Running a palm wine bar was very popular among women as a means to earn an independent income.

2.1.2. Urbanization

In the fifties Bamenda became the capital of the new Bamenda Province. This resulted in a considerable growth of the service industries, such as schools, a hospital, a new market, offices, and banks. The population doubled within nine years, by migration from any region within the Grassfields and outside. After independence and reunification with French Cameroon in 1961, the population growth continued even faster, due to the influx of the Bamileke. Today, the population growth is 17.7% per year (Gwan, 1982) which makes Bamenda one of the most rapidly growing towns of Cameroon.8

8 From 1,300 inhabitants in 1934 Bamenda rose to 9,765 in 1953, 18,500 in 1964, 33,500 in 1970 and 68,000 in 1976 (Akonumbo, 1971/Van den Boorn, 1984). The sex-ratio stayed around 80 (women as opposed to 100 men) until recently. For 1987 the population has been estimated at 110,690 inhabitants (Lopez-Escartin, 1991).
The Bamenda population in 1964 mainly consisted of Mankon inhabitants (the largest original population group); in addition to 6% migrants from all over the Grassfields, 3% from the rest of Cameroon, and again 6% from abroad (mainly Ibo). In absolute figures the population is composed as follows (Akonumbo, 1971):

- Ngemba/ Mankon speaking: 16,180
- Hausa (descendants of the first Abakpa settlers): 42
- Other Grassfielders (Bali, Meta, Bafut): 941
- Other Cameroonianians, mostly Bamileke: 409
- Foreigners, mostly Ibo: 917
- Total: 18,487

The town consists of three parts: Mankon, Nkwen and 'Station' (see map p. 13).

1. Mankon, consisting of the Old Town (former Abakpa) and its surrounding extensions (Azire, Ntumlung, Atuakom, Meta, Ntarinkon), is the most densely populated and largest part of the town. The suburbs of Mankon have mostly preserved their rural character, and include many cultivated fields. Economically speaking, Mankon is the most active part of the town where the trade centre, market, small-sized industries are situated. Here the public services can also be found such as the hospital, post office, pharmacies, library, museum, schools. Nearly all of these are situated outside the Abakpa area. There is a very large market at Commercial Avenue with hundreds of permanent stalls, where almost every type of goods (mostly imported or smuggled from Nigeria) can be obtained. Outside, around the entire market area, the female vendors sit side by side selling vegetables, fruit, spices, rice, and other products.

2. The Nkwen section, which had 3,150 inhabitants in 1970, was built on Nkwen territory by migrants from the North. Due to expansion of the town this settlement was brought under the administration of the Bamenda city council, and has become the second most densely populated section.

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9 I could not get hold of more recent figures than these. The general expectation is that the number of migrants has increased proportionally since 1964.

10 This name refers to the town's district as well as to the population which holds the land in this area.

11 In 1976 it counted 44,764 inhabitants, with a population density ranging from 180 inh/ha in the centre to 20 inh/ha in the peripheries.
3. The third section is formed by the administrative district "Station" on top of the escarpment, comprising most of the Ministries and administrative buildings, and a small community (in 1970 1200 inhabitants). Especially Europeans and Americans, who prefer the cooler mountain climate to the higher temperature in the valley, live here.

In the fifties many of the houses in the town still were "grass houses" with adobe walls, built by the residents themselves. After a big fire in 1957 the administration started with town-planning. Houses were built with bricks and zinc sheets or tiles, roads were widened, and a system of water mains and electricity was constructed. In 1960 the town was given a face-lift in preparation (and by way of manipulation) for a referendum about independence (Akonumbo, 1971: 36). After independence the centres of urban growth outside the Ring Road (including Nkwen) were gradually incorporated into the town.

2.2. Abakpa-Old Town

Old Town or Abakpa, the oldest quarter of Bamenda which I studied for three months, at first makes the same dreary, neglected impression on the visitor, as so many slums in Third World countries.

The quarter’s area is rather limited and officially counted 8,250 inhabitants in 1982 (data from the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing). Most of the roads and streets are full of pot-holes and ruts due to the alternation of rainy and dry seasons. During the rainy season they become vast quagmires, which are impassable for cars and hazardous to the pedestrian. The streets are lined with heaps of refuse, despite the weekly rounds of the waste-disposal service. Running water and electricity is present only along the main road; sewage is lacking entirely.

Yet, upon closer acquaintance the quarter does not make a gloomy impression. It is not as busy as it must have been in the fifties but is certainly not the "ghost town", described by Akonumbo in 1971. By then all government services had abandoned the quarter in search of better and more spacious accommodation. Recently, a number of offices have returned and are attracting new employers and activities once more.

However, Old Town mainly functions thanks to the informal economy. During the day women are always busy selling food and cigarettes, children are playing or working, and the palm-wine and beer bars are always crowded, especially
with men. Everywhere, and all day long, women are busy cooking, washing, scrubbing, or selling. Many women, moreover, leave in the morning to work on their fields or sell goods at the market. Only the oldest women and the young mothers with children stay behind to sell from their homes. There are tables placed in front of many houses with fruit and vegetables, sometimes with oil or spices, with which they try to earn some money. Others prepare snacks such as "poff-poff" (doughnut balls), fish, or groundnuts, which their children try to sell within the quarter. Furthermore, Old Town has numerous sewing and photography workshops, and repair-shops for cars, bicycles, shoes, and electrical appliances, where the work is mostly done by men.

At night it is even more lively and crowded in the bars and dimly-lit streets, where women grill fish and corn cobs. All of Bamenda meet here under the loud-speakers with Makossa dance music. "As night falls, sidewalk brazier fires sizzle with roasted fresh corn, plums, baked corn, and groundnuts in the rugged streets of the quarter." (Cameroon Tribune, June 7, 1989). Entertainment can mainly be found in the four hotels and adjoining nightclubs and the numerous restaurants and bars. There are also three cinemas which show Indian adventure films and love stories.

Houses in Old Town are mainly two or three-roomed, built in the style of the forties and fifties, out of dried adobe bricks (sun-dried blocks) or cement blocks with zinc-plated roofs. These houses were often built by the owners and their families themselves in stages, depending on the money available. Construction could come to a halt for months if the money ran out. Another category of houses which can be seen quite often in this quarter are the tenement houses: blocks of six to eight rooms, built by the owners (sometimes assisted by labourers) which are let to families per one or two rooms (for an average of 5000 Fcfa per room per month). Kitchen, bath, and toilet are usually communal facilities, and often there is a small plot around the house (average 10-15 m2) for the tenants' food cultivation. In the kitchens the women usually cook on wood or charcoal. I saw only few people using the more expensive butane gas or oil. Furthermore, here and there -especially on the outskirts- there are half-finished houses and slums (made of parts of zinc

12 Only a few women have formal jobs.

13 Old Town has its dark side, too, as it is known as a breeding place for crimes such as burglaries, pickpocketing, car thefts. These crimes seem to be increasing of late, due to the economic crisis and high unemployment.
plates) inhabited by the poorest people, and newly-arrived migrants. Generally there is enough space around the houses for food cultivation, mainly vegetables and maize and sometimes bananas. ¹⁴

As in many other quarters, social life in Old Town is closely linked to organisations and associations, including social-Christian ones (of which the Catholic Women's Association and the Presbyterian Christian Women's Fellowship are the largest for women¹⁵), economic ones (numerous njangis, thrift-and-loan societies which regularly hold festive meetings; and the North West Business Women's Association), and political ones (the C.P.D.M. and W.C.P.D.M., the Cameroonian party with its divisions for women). Besides those organisations there is the regular social network of relatives and neighbours assuring mutual assistance. At events such as marriages or deaths all members of an association assemble to pay their respects and offer assistance.

2.2.1. Social stratification within Old Town

I will now sketch the social stratification in Old Town (in so far as data are available¹⁶) on the basis of differences of income and career opportunities and derivatives such as education and status.

Income differentiation in Old Town, according to the Household Survey (1982) is rather high. On the one hand, more than half (seven out of thirteen) of all city-dwellers surveyed with a monthly income higher than 500,000 Fcfa (≈ Dfl 3500,-) live in Old Town, and work in the wholesale trade or in industry. On

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¹⁴ According to Akonumbo (1971: 56) and Champaud (1983: 232) coffee is grown in these gardens, too, but this is not my experience in Old Town, nor of my informants. In Old Town the soil consists of sand, loam, and clay and is not very fertile generally, yielding only poor harvests. Still, every available spot is used to grow food crops and is well cared for. In the peripheral districts coffee is indeed grown.

¹⁵ As I focused my research on the living conditions of women, I am not able to present extensive information on men.

¹⁶ Most data come from a survey held by the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing in 1982. We have to take the current economic crisis into account, however, which has had serious consequence for individual social conditions in the past four years.
the other hand, the lowest incomes (up to 15,000 Fcfa) show an over-
representation in Old Town, too: 18% against 14% in all-Bamenda. This also
holds good for the employee earning an average income of 30-50,000 Fcfa per
month (100 Fcfa = Dfl 7.-). In Old Town, 26% of the families have to do with
less than 30,000 Fcfa per month, an income which is hardly enough to maintain
a family. Old Town is not the poorest quarter, though, because in Nkwen 42% of
all families earn less than 30,000 Fcfa, and in Bayelle 31%.17

Although Old Town can be regarded as a slum quarter, not only the poorest
people seek shelter here.18 There is a small group of Old Towners who are
better off and could be called successful, as the above statistics show. Many
of the people who arrived with the migration wave in the twenties and thirties
still live here. They have developed and built the area themselves, or have
been granted land by the Fon of Mankon. These people now regard themselves as
the owners (or heirs) of the land and the houses on it. The Household survey
in 1982 showed that 55% of the house-owners in Old Town belong to this group
of first occupants. Another 38% had bought their land or dwelling.
The original Hausa people in Abakpa settled as a group around the old market
and still live there, somewhat apart from the other residents of Old Town.
Around this Hausa area one can discern various neighbourhoods in Old Town, in
which each new population group (Balì, Banso, Meta) is concentrated (Soh,
1983: 30).

Official unemployment figures in Bamenda, as in many Third World cities, are
high but not exceptional: only 27% of the population has a formal job, whereas

17 The outcome of this survey might give a rather too positive picture of the
situation. The survey was carried out among "heads of households" who were not
gender-specified, and are for the sake of convenience counted as males. From
my own and other studies (Stichter & Hay, 1984) it appears that 30-60% of the
women are heads of households and often have very low incomes. Moreover, the
concept of "household" has not been defined in the survey; it is not clear
whether it means the occupants of one house, of a compound, people who live
off one income, or those who eat from one kitchen. The data on incomes are
based on a collective pattern of income and spending, in which all the
earnings of one family are added up. Here, biases can also occur because the
interests in spending within one household or family can differ widely, e.g.
short-term expenses, such as consumption of luxury goods or alcohol against
the long-termed expenses of school fees, business investments and the like.

18 New migrants often settle with their relatives, which is not necessarily
in Old Town. The semi-rural periphery of Bamenda attracts many migrants, too.
over 65% is unemployed. These figures, however, do not take into account the large category of "self-employed", who earn their living in the informal sector. In the districts of Mbatu, Ntamulung, Ntarinkon, and Old Town, the unemployment percentage is higher than the urban average. Of the 27% formally employed inhabitants, more than one-third work in industry and commerce, nearly 20% in the civil service, and the rest in sectors such as the services, free professions, and handicrafts.

The contribution of women to the formal sector of Cameroon is still very limited, however. In the entire civil service there are only 16.7% women, in the private enterprises and parastatals a few more: approx. 20% (MINASCOF, 1988), mostly working as lower clerical staff and production labourers. In the sectors of education and health care more women can be found in higher positions. Uneducated women are active only in the informal sector, the most vulnerable and often worse-paid economic sector.

The activities of workers in the informal sector are not easy to assess quantitatively because, as the term "informal" states, they are excluded from the official statistics, and often remain invisible to outsiders. By means of interviews with women I was able to draw a picture of their activities, which I will present in the following chapter.

2.2.2. The roads to success

Another aspect of social stratification is the variety of roads leading to success or merely to an improvement of living conditions. A striking detail, which came up in my own research and in that of others, is that most people lay special emphasis on education for their children. My informants did all they could to pay school fees even up to university level, in the expectation that their children, after having acquired a good job, will take care of their parents in return. For the wealthier inhabitants, gathering dependents by paying for education is one of the roads to success (see Rowlands, 1988). Despite this universal pursuit of education there is still a lot of illiteracy in Old Town. I noticed far too many children wandering around the market or in the streets during school hours, selling goods or looking for jobs. For the very poorest it is often impossible to spend money on school fees, books, and uniforms regularly. Moreover, the quarter has a shortage of secondary and technical schools, and only has one Arabic school (for the Hausa) and two primary schools.
Other strategies to distinguish oneself from others and to measure success are based on material goods such as a car, western clothes, a brick house with water and electricity, furnished with television, telephone, radio, fridge, a thickly-padded settee, and a dining-room (Rowlands, 1988). Concerning home furnishing my observations correspond to those of Rowlands. One immediately notices the subtle differences in success: in the households of my informants these were differences in furniture and clothing (shabby or torn or not) and in the number of photographs of the children with good jobs (preferably abroad) on the wall. I myself probably contributed to this form of success by posing for photographs together with my informants, which now hang on their walls.

2.3. Population groups

Having given a short review of the genesis and social stratification in Bamenda, I will now turn to the various population groups living in this area and will discuss some of their basic socio-political structures.

2.3.1. Socio-political basic structures

The villages and chiefdoms which came into being over the centuries varied strongly in size (from a few hundreds to tens of thousands of inhabitants), but they developed a number of common basic principles. These are: a mostly patrilineal kinship organization, a self-supporting economy, with a division of labour according to gender and age, and a form of social stratification.

2.3.1.1. Patrilineal kinship structures

The organisation of each community in the Grassfields is determined by kinship production relations, of which the polygynous household is the smallest production and consumption unit. In Mankon a family head had an average of six women19, all of whom managed their own households (Warnier, 1985). The family head controlled the distribution of land among the members, took care of the rituals on behalf of the ancestors, and solved internal conflicts.

19 Notables had 20 wives on average (Warnier, 1985).
Social relations within the family were marked by imbalance of power between the family head on the one hand, and women and unmarried men on the other. Basically, the family head had to provide each of his sons with a wife, but in practice he might rather keep her (or the bride-price) for himself. So it was not uncommon for sons to marry only after reaching the age of thirty or forty; sometimes they never married and had to stay at their father's house (id.). As a result, the family head's household included three generations at least, subdivided into separate family nuclei around a wife and her children. Mothers often took great pains to save up for their sons' bride-prices by selling their farm products. In doing this they tried to assure themselves of a carefree old age in the household of one of their sons. Unmarried daughters automatically stayed with their mothers and went to live in their husbands' compounds after marriage.

This form of stratification within the households had been developed more strongly in Mankon than in the surrounding villages. Mankon women ranked below men, and always had to respect and obey them. Women's sexuality was under strict control, too (Warnier, 1985).

"Though debasing and humiliating practises such as excision and seclusion have never been mentioned in the Grassfields, women were always dependent on men -father, husband, maternal uncle or brother- to whom in principle they owed total obedience." (Nkwii & Warnier, 1982: 64).

2.3.1.2. Political stratification

A number of families formed a village community, led by a Fon, with an average size of 500 to 800 inhabitants (Kaberry, 1952: 10). A village was sometimes subdivided into several quarters, ruled by a quarter head. The administration of a chiefdom (consisting of one or more villages) was undertaken by a council of clan heads together with the Fon, and supplemented by some other influential men. The council had the right to take autonomous decisions on matters of war, peace, and serious crimes. Family and clan heads controlled the allocation of land and hunting rights, and common jurisdiction. The Fon's duty was to protect the village and to preserve unity. Most Fons had only limited executive and judiciary powers before the nineteenth century. However, they were held in high esteem and enjoyed an exclusively high status since they were the only ones fully initiated in all rites, secrets and

20 Except for a few larger city states and kingdoms.
associations of the community. They were intermediaries between the ancestors and the living but were not almighty. They could be punished or dismissed by the council of family/clan heads who "in modern terminology...can be regarded as being the cabinet with the king or chief as president." (Soh: 1983: 14).

A number of kingdoms (Bafut, Kom, Nso, Bum) developed a stronger hierarchical structure in which the Fon acquired a status of divine king. As a result, greater class differences arose between the royal family, court officials, counsellors, ordinary citizens, and serfs. Nkwi and Warnier assume that this stratification did not come into being until the nineteenth century, and was stimulated further by the colonial government (1982: 59).21

2.3.1.3. Self-supporting economy

The third important common basic principle in the Grassfields was subsistence agriculture by means of "slash-and-burn" techniques and shifting cultivation, combined with small livestock breeding and trade. The large polygynous families formed the basis of the economy. Every woman had her own agricultural produce on her "own" land. Mankon women cultivated on average half a hectare around the compound along with six smaller fields a few kilometres away (Rowling, 1948). Crops cultivated by women were yams, cowpeas, later groundnuts, millet, and maize, and a range of other varieties. They sold the surplus in the market. The family head gave land to every woman in his household and organized his sons' labour. Women were responsible for the production of food and drinks for communal festivities and for commerce.

Except for the common cultivation of food crops and breeding of small stock, each village specialized in manufacturing a specific product as a means of trade with other villages (pottery, weaving, baskets, tobacco). Staple foods such as beans and grain were also part of this regional trade, in which both men and women were involved. Women were especially active in the retail trade. Over the centuries business activities extended to all corners of the Grassfields, but contacts with peoples outside the region were rare until the nineteenth century. Grassfielders did not travel for more than two days, and

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21 Thus, most of the less-centralized chiefdoms claim to originate from the Widekum area, west of Bamenda, whereas the highly stratified kingdoms maintain to have moved from Tikar (North-east from the Grassfields). Warnier makes it plausible that both claims deal more with the nature and origin of their alliances than with their migration movements (Warnier, 1988).
kept in touch with their business contacts mainly through village heads. For long-distance trade, mostly done by Hausa men, products such as ivory, kola nuts, iron, and slaves were traded against salt and cloths from the North (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982: 43).

2.3.1.4. Division of labour

As a common pattern of the division of labour in the Grassfields we can say that men and women each had their own duties and spheres of influence. As one of my informants stated: "The women till the soil, the men make organisation for other things."

Men were occupied with activities which brought them status and wealth (trading, handicraft, political organisation), and contributed certain products to the household such as oil, salt, and meat. Women gained their status, money, and a certain degree of independence from their agricultural performances and retail trade. They were responsible for subsistence agriculture, food preparation, and child care.

In agriculture men used only to prepare the land, after which women cultivated it (planting, weeding, harvesting) and sold their produce. Furthermore, men occupied themselves with planting and maintaining raffia and banana trees (in the fifties also coffee), breeding of pigs and goats, and drinking "white mimbo": palm wine.

Women in less prosperous households often had more power and influence than in the notable patriarchal households. Because they sold food at the market they were the family members with money. In the colonial period women often paid the poll-tax and palm wine for men, and later also school fees for the children. According to my female informants, most men did not have money, except for the village and clan heads who often set up their own businesses. Customarily, however, women were not expected to accumulate large wealth which might offer them an independent life. Retail trade was allowed, however. As long as a woman earned only a small income and used the money for the household and her children, her husband did not interfere. As soon as her

22 Both sexes had their own political and social associations.

23 According to my informants, Tikar and Bali men are in the habit of doing agricultural labour to help women, whereas Widekum men only "like drink mimbo". I could not verify this with male informants.
income increased, however, her husband might fear that she would become too independent and would not need him any more or neglect her duties.\textsuperscript{24} Therefore, a lot of men claimed the administration of large sums of their wives' money themselves (ideally as bankers only -Kaberry, 1952). That is why a woman usually gave the money she earned to her husband to administer it for the benefit of her and her children. Women themselves looked upon this as "feeding" their husbands and children.

2.3.2. Migration

Until the beginning of the nineteenth century the Grassfields were rather isolated from the major trade routes (Trans-Sahara and the coastal trade with the Europeans), except for the route Dschang-Bamenda-Foumban-Chamba. On the one hand, the area was inaccessible due to infrastructural deficiencies, on the other, it was surrounded by buffer states which kept contact with trading states in Northern Nigeria at a distance. This situation changed due to increasing military pressure from the north and penetrating commercial enterprises from the south (Nkwisi & Warnier, 1982: 79-80).

In the nineteenth century three centralized kingdoms ruled the Bamenda Plateau: Mankon, Nkwen, and Bafut. A few autonomous villages (among which Mbutu, Bambiliuwe and Awing) were situated in the surrounding mountain range. Mankon's oral tradition\textsuperscript{25} mentions migration movements of seven clans which settled via different routes from Widekum at the west bank of the Mezam river (in Alamankon). After one or two generations the seven clans united and chose one Fon in order to defend themselves against their neighbours. The Bafut and the Mea were the most powerful among these (Warnier, 1985). Little is known about the decades after this unification, until the Bali-Chamba invaded the area.

Around 1825 the area was ravaged by Bali-Chamba raids from the north (present Nigeria). This horse-riding people, driven to the south by the Fulani, settled

\textsuperscript{24} At present however, it is clear that even wealthy women continue to take responsibility for their households. They are even forced to do so, as more men are withdrawing their financial support to the household economy (Simo, 1989).

\textsuperscript{25} This has been traced by Warnier (1985). We have no data about the other kingdoms.
in the Grassfields by conquering, dispersing, and subjecting the population. Soon they became the greatest slave traders of the region and later entered into alliances with the German colonizers. All this did not make them very popular with the surrounding population.

After the abolition of Atlantic slavery around 1840, an increasing demand for palm oil by the European industries made many palm oil plantations prosper in Calabar (Southern Nigeria). The Grassfields, among others, were destined to supply slave labour for these plantations in exchange for European goods such as rifles and cloths. In this way they attracted the attention of German traders and discoverers who wanted to tap the source of their trade immediately, without interference from the Calabar traders (more about this later). The chiefdoms which were situated along the trade route (Nsọ, Kom, Mankon, Bafut, Bali) developed into strong, stratified, and powerful realms. Smaller, autonomous villages were incorporated or joined voluntarily, partly due to the increasing acts of violence in the area.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century several armed conflicts flared up between Buali, Bafut, Mankon (and Nkwen) with varying alliances. These conflicts concerned mainly political and economic independence, and access to trading products and labour force (especially women who supplied children and labour). Except in times of conflict, the various peoples were on friendly terms and drank, married, and mourned together. The tension could rise quickly, though (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982).

The stronger centralization and power of the kingdoms of Mankon and Bafut were not established by coincidence or as a result of better trading, according to Warnier, but proved to be necessary as a survival strategy for settling in the open highlands (1975: 421).

2.4. Colonization of West-Cameroon

On July 14th 1884 two Douala chiefs signed an agreement with German representatives which stipulated that, in exchange for an exclusive trade monopoly for the Douala, their immediate hinterland and trade routes would be protected by the Germans. Soon, however, the latter skirted the trade monopoly of the Douala and entered the interior in search of trade products and labourers. Cameroon became a German protectorate with Buea as its capital, and was acknowledged as such by the Berlin Conference in 1885.
With military force the Germans began large-scale land expropriation: the population was allowed to keep six hectares per hut, whereas the rest became German Crown domain. Large parts of this domain were sold as plantations to Europeans (Eyongetah & Brain, 1974: 85). Tens of thousands of labourers were recruited through a system of taxes that could only be paid in money (earned as wage labour), and through coercive measures.26 German interference in the African trading activities, and their bad treatment of labourers, evoked a lot of resistance and uprisings. These, however, did not stand any chance against the more effective German weapons. In the Grassfields the Mankon and Bafut were defeated in 1901 after two wars (in which hundreds were killed), after which the Germans established an effectual administration, helped by the Bali. The king of Bali received dominion over thirty villages, from which he had to supply taxes, tribute (in the form of ivory), and labourers (Warnier, 1975: 282).

The Germans built their military and administrative post on a protruding rock in the Bambuto mountains, overlooking the subjected population. This "Station", the beginning of what would later become the provincial capital Bamenda, was amply staffed by military and civil servants and many locals: interpreters, messengers, porters, labourers, craftsmen.

The Germans introduced an administrative system which was further developed by the British, who called it "Indirect Rule". The German colonial authorities started to transform and adapt the indigenous judiciary institutions to German law, but they were soon interrupted. The repercussions of the First World War extended as far as the colonies, inducing the Germans even in Cameroon to surrender to the advancing British, French, and Belgium troops. Western Cameroon was occupied by the British and placed under their authority in 1922 by the League of Nations, while the largest part of German Kamerun became a French colony. The British annexed their colony to Nigeria as a province (with Buea as the provincial capital) and installed a Senior Divisional Officer and a minor staff in Bamenda, which became one of the districts. Their neglect of the German-made infrastructure made communication in the area, and from Bamenda to the coast or to Lagos, very difficult. The Grassfields became rather isolated from the Nigerian and French-Cameroonian trade centres, and

26 They were deployed as plantation workers in the south, as porters of trade goods, and as road and railway construction workers. The bad working conditions, harsh measures and tropical diseases such as malaria led to 30-50% loss of life among plantation labourers.
the British did not bother to change this situation initially (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982: 214).

Not until the forties did the British start to encourage male farmers in the Grassfields to grow coffee, which by then commanded a good price. Shortly after, coffee became the most important export product of the region, claiming more and more land for its cultivation as time went on. This development created many problems for women, whose food production was thus threatened. Numerous conflicts about land and protests by women arose as a result of this (Qh/b 1958-1), as will be shown in chapter four.

2.4.1. Indirect rule

The British introduced Indirect Rule in the Bamenda division first, because there were several powerful leaders who could be trusted with the administration (Cb 1916/11). Five of these Fons became chairmen of a Native Court which had to maintain law and order.\(^27\)

The essence of Indirect Rule was that traditional leaders should rule over their original territories, guided and advised by a British official. The policy which was adopted in 1922 implied:

"Resuscitation of indigenous forms of government, the consolidation of tribal units, the selection of the rightful chief, his installation... the re-establishment of the clan council together with the definition of the jurisdiction and powers of the clan council or chief." (Chilver, 1963: 108).

Apart from the prohibition of undesirable practices (in the eyes of Europeans) such as slave trade and poison-ordeals\(^28\) which were replaced by English customs and ideas, customary law was largely maintained. British colonists believed that indigenous leaders originally had all legislative powers in their hands. Indirect Rule, however, gave these Fons not only more power than they had ever enjoyed, but also different powers: judiciary and legislative ones.

Soon a number of regional or local Native Courts and Native Authorities had been installed and an allowance been granted. Controlled by the British District Officer and his staff the local Authorities were responsible for the

\(^{27}\) I will discuss the functioning of the Native or Customary Court in detail in Chapter Four.

\(^{28}\) This meant a judgement by taking poison: vomiting the poison proved innocence, dying from it proved guilt.
maintenance of law and order, the collection of taxes and labourers, and public hygienic care (Cb 1918/2).

The Abakpa settlement fell under the Ngemba Native Authority, together with 15 other villages. This N.A. has a history of jealousy, border conflicts, incompetence of staff, and corruption. Part of the problem was caused by shortage of colonial staff administrators. The records are full of complaints and frustrations of officials about shortage of staff, materials, and time, as a result of which they could not give proper advice or influence the economic exploitation of the region. Another part of the problem obviously lies in the fact that the Fons had to conform to an organizational commitment and to objectives which were designed by foreigners, the occupiers of their country. On the one hand, these Fons had lost their previous independence, on the other, they had gained more power than ever before, in order to implement new colonial aims. Often clashes of interests occurred between them and the colonial administration about the aims and manners of administering, an example of which will be given in Chapter Four.

This administrative disfunctioning, rivalry, and incompetence, met by alternate attempts to decentralization and centralization, was continued into the sixties. The original population groups living around Abakpa (Mankon and Nkwen) in particular figured prominently in the political-economic clash of interests in Bamenda. A range of reorganisations and training programmes were necessary before the city administration could act as a unity (Ja/b 1960-3). In 1964 a Mankon Area Urban Council was installed (the first one in West-Cameroon), presided over by Fon Angwafor III of Mankon, and later on by a mayor.29 Not until 1974 was the pluralist character of the city acknowledged by changing its name from Mankon to Bamenda.

2.5. Summary and conclusion

The history of the various peoples of the Grassfields can be traced back to the beginning of the eighteenth century. The data which have been recorded until now have made clear that these peoples did not have a very stratified structure. It was only after they made contact with the Atlantic and Trans-

29 The name "Mankon...Council" indicated attempts of the Mankon population and its Fon to attract the hegemony of the town. This attitude led to many conflicts with other population groups who felt dominated by the Mankon.
Saharan trade that a number of chiefdoms developed into powerful, stratified kingdoms. Others retained their autonomous and less stratified organization. If they could not maintain their independence they joined the more powerful realms or were annexed by them.

The history of Bamenda is marked by migration of many population groups from the Grassfields and outside to the Hausa settlement Abakpa. For a long time political rivalry between the various kingdoms Mankon, Nkwen, Bali, and Bafut (stimulated by the divide-and-rule tactics of the colonizers) exacerbated the administrative malfunctioning of the region. Especially the role of the Fon of Mankon, struggling against erosion of his powers, is worth mentioning. The town of Bamenda finally acquired its own city council in 1974.

Bamenda developed into the largest town in the North West Province of Cameroon, with an increased growth since the sixties. Urbanization took place on a large scale as a result of the steady growth of commerce and services, which involved an influx of migrants. Still, Bamenda does not have the metropolitan air of for example Douala, but breathes a semi-rural atmosphere. This is especially noticeable in the suburbs, where a lot of coffee and food crops are cultivated.

The original settlement Abakpa (now Old Town) which, in its hey-day during the fifties, was busy and active, suffered from decline and administrative negligence due to the rapid growth of the suburbs. Public services and traders moved away; the quarter no longer took part in town-planning. It became a refuge for poor migrants who set up their own (informal) housing accommodation and economy. Nearly all the inhabitants (both men and women) of Old Town take part in the informal economy, women being especially active in the retail trade in food, drinks, etcetera.

Various levels of income and status can be achieved in the informal sector, but the majority of the people are very poor. Nowadays, Old Town is an old disadvantaged quarter with high unemployment and widespread illiteracy, a quarter neglected by the City Council but stigmatized as a breeding place for crime. It is also a quarter with solid social relations, which somewhat alleviates the desperate situation of poverty. Despite recent attempts by the City Council to undertake the renovation of the quarter, nothing has actually been done yet.
CHAPTER THREE: URBAN WOMEN AND LAND

Having described the genesis of Bamenda and its oldest quarter Old Town, I would like to go more deeply into the living conditions of women in the town. I do not pretend to give a complete picture of their situation, because, especially in cities, class and gender stratification between the various layers of society, and between women too, is more pronounced than in rural areas. In Old Town these differences are prominent, too.

The inhabitants of an old people's quarter have to cope with a lack of infrastructure, education and spending power. As a result, they are at a serious disadvantage, and have to make more efforts to overcome socio-economic problems than people in a better-off quarter. Women are especially disadvantaged, as will be shown in this chapter.

Women in poor quarters often balance between marginalization and survival. Marginalization means, as we saw in the first chapter, the loss of economic resources such as access to land which is not compensated for by sufficient alternatives, such as a flourishing business. If the social safety net starts to disappear, such as support from husband, children, or extended family a process of marginalization may be set in motion (Grijns, 1986).

On the basis of a number of case studies, resulting from my research in Bamenda, I will discuss the survival strategies of urban women (section 3.2), restricting myself to the most common activities in the informal sector of Old Town, and leaving the few educated women with formal employment aside. I will first give a brief account of the research methods employed (section 3.1.). On the basis of family ties, trade, and access to land, the various survival strategies of women are worked out and placed within a broader scope in section 3.3. Moreover, I will treat the marriage and divorce legislation briefly because it regulates women's access to property. Some aspects of commerce and financing will be brought up in section 3.4.. Finally I will deal with women's needs and possibilities of landownership in section 3.5. and examine the relative importance of land for urban women.

3.1. Research methods

A total of 50 women and seven men in the oldest quarter of Bamenda were interviewed, in several stages. I was assisted by a female interpreter who excelled in showing me the way in this "urban jungle". It was only after some weeks that I was able to visit my informants without her help, and even then
I was still unable to interview them extensively. ¹

With the help of one of the Quarter Heads of Old Town I succeeded in approaching the population. Firstly, he introduced me to fifteen older men and women who could inform me about the genesis of Bamenda and their own life-history. I found the other informants more or less by chance, by walking through the quarter regularly with my interpreter/assistant and approaching women who were busy at home cleaning, cooking, trading, talking and so forth. In only three cases did women refuse to speak to us². We asked for the mother of the house, the one responsible for feeding the household³. Often these women were middle-aged or younger.

The procedure I eventually followed may have led to a slightly biased research population. There is, for example, an under-representation of women in formal employment (being absent during the day-time), and an over-representation of older women (among whom many widows) and sellers of food and drink, since these are always present in the quarter. However, I aimed at representing all adult age groups.

In the course of the introductory survey various subjects were brought up, such as the migration pattern, family circumstances, the number of children, education, degree of organization, economic activities, and access to land. At a later stage I interviewed ten of these women more extensively about their land situation, the practice and problems of loaning, leasing and selling of land, their trade, their way of life in Old Town, sometimes their expectations for the future, and as much as possible about their life-histories. I have used the quantitative data from the survey as a comparative background for the presented case-studies. It must be borne in mind, however, that the total number of interviewees is too small (n=50) to draw conclusions about the entire urban female population.

3.2. Women in the city

Although West-African towns in colonial times often had a surplus of men, the last decades have seen a rapid increase in the number of women, which

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¹ Most women only spoke pidgin-English and were not able to understand my school English at all. In the beginning this was certainly reciprocal.

² I excluded Hausa women from my survey, being not dependent on land.

³ "Household" is defined as a group of persons who lives in the same compound and is fed by the same source of nourishment.
balances the male-female ratio (Robertson, 1984: 41). The town became a refuge for women trying to escape from the pressures of "back-breaking" country-life (cf. Obbo, 1980), or seeking to avoid patriarchal control or an undesirable marriage (Little, 1973). They could be wives of polygynous village heads or Fons who felt neglected, or felt they were only good for farming or amusement. Furthermore, they could be women who were in danger of being married off to a much older man, who were ill-treated or simply looking for economic independence. Often it is just a matter of survival, in cases of rural land becoming exhausted or inaccessible to certain groups of women. The anonymity of the town makes it possible for women to build up their own livelihood and follow their own choices. One of the consequences, however, is that their bonds with the family, the land and social network become much weaker or are even broken off. Migrating women are often seen as immoral or as whores, especially those who have a job in town or are well-dressed. Already in 1955, people in Bamenda were greatly concerned about the large number of single women, who were seen as a menace to the stability and ethics of marriage (Qh/b 1955-1).

Because women were seen as a menace (and were only valued according to their domestic and agricultural tasks by the colonial rulers) they did not receive education or a stimulus for employment in the formal sector. Women's agricultural contribution had great importance for the reproduction of male wage labour, and could maintain the wages of men at a low level. Despite the many barriers women encounter in finding sufficient resources, the ideology of women being the "feeders" of their family is maintained indiminished. On average, 60% of the urban women (Mainet, 1985) live in an unstable or varying family circle in which they are the sole bread-winner, being divorced, unmarried, or widowed. Married women, too, are often responsible for food production, although they may share the large expenditures with their husbands. For these reasons, many urban women are obliged to find some economic resources, and only have access to work in the informal sector and in agriculture.

3.2.1. Women in Old Town

In this section I will describe the way of life of different groups of women in Old Town, based on case studies made during my research from May to August 1989. Although they are not entirely representative of the female population of Bamenda, the problems that occur are so universally valid that they can
offer sufficient insight into the way of living, the problems, and the survival strategies of urban women. I will therefore refer repeatedly to these case studies in the following sections and chapters, and where information on urban women elsewhere (e.g. Douala) is available, data will be compared.

Case 1: Mary, the married atchu-seller

Mary M, a vigorous woman of 35 or 36 from a village outside Bamenda, is an example of a married woman who managed to set up her own independent business. Her husband, whom she lives with, has a small construction company, originally in Yaounde where they got married, but for the past ten years in Bamenda. He has a second wife who lives elsewhere in Bamenda. They have four schoolgoing children, whom Mary expects to become teachers or mechanics. She herself has only had a few years of education.

At our first meeting she is busy peeling cocoyams in front of her restaurant, which is sparsely furnished with a few wooden benches against a wall covered with calendars, and a table with glasses and plates. She sells palm-wine and plates of atchu, the local specialty consisting of a ring of mashed cocoyams in red sauce (made of palm oil and limestom, and a piece of stewed meat. The pulp is dipped into the sauce and eaten by using the index finger.

At five o'clock in the morning she takes a bus or cab to her native village 20 km away, where the palm trees are tapped at three o'clock at night, and the sale of palm wine starts at six. At nine she returns to cook the atchu of that day and to sell palm wine. The cocoyams for the atchu are harvested from her own land or bought at the market if necessary. She regularly works her land, and besides cocoyams she also grows plantains, cassava, maize, soya beans, and green beans. She admits that her work is very tedious but a girlfriend assists her with the farming. When she goes to her plot, her husband leaves his business to replace her in the restaurant (obviously she does not sell atchu then).

She rents the land on which her restaurant has been built with financial support from her husband. Until recently she farmed her crops on family land in her village, but because her brothers started to speak ill of her (since her land kept yielding good harvests) she left the plot. This year she has bought a new one with her own money for 400,000 Fcfa, close to her native village. She bought her first plot long ago, in the quarter of Nkwen, partly with financial support from her husband. Her house was built on this land, and there is a plot for food cultivation, too. According to Mary, as a polygamist her husband is obliged to give both his wives money to start a business.

She acquired her own income by putting a weekly amount of 2000-3000 Fcfa in a njangi, a revolving savings bank, which provided her with the sum of money to buy this second plot after a year. She has already applied for a land certificate but has not received one as yet.

Case 2: Cecilia, the divorced food-seller

For an elderly, divorced woman like Cecilia L. (approx. 55 years old) with five children still living at home, life is not easy. From her seventh year on when her father died, she had a difficult life in her village Banso (40 km from Bamenda). Although her mother had only a small family by way of social support, she decided to raise her children alone. When Cecilia married, she cultivated a food plot in Banso until her divorce, 20 years ago.
Being a divorced fatherless woman left her without access to family land, especially after she left for Bamenda. In Bamenda she earned a living through a range of activities. She sold palm wine, but that business did not flourish. After she became ill from frying poff-poff, she switched to selling prepared food and food crops in the streets. She has a family plot in Banso where she cultivates her own crops, in between coffee and plantains planted by her uncle. At present she has planted a few trees which she can sell as firewood after four years. Furthermore she loans land from family or friends every year in Nkwen, "Up-Station", or Bali. This, however, is a very precarious and restricted access to land. Cecilia was often not at home but was very eager to talk to me. The times I visited her she looked thin and hurried, sometimes worried, but always very friendly. At one stage I missed her for two weeks when she had trod on a broken bottle during farming and had to recuperate with her family in Banso. During that period she obviously had no income.

Her financial situation makes a rather gloomy impression. As stated, her income is gained mainly by selling food. For this purpose she buys meat for 2000 Fcfa, which she divides into 25 pieces over three pans. The other ingredients are either from her own plot or bought at the market. A plate of food costs 100 Fcfa, but she also gives food away to friends and her own children. On average she is left with 500 Fcfa a day, which makes a profit of 3000 Fcfa a week. Other irregular earnings come from selling crops, approx. 20,000 Fcfa a year = 400 Fcfa a week. Total income: 3400 Fcfa a week. She is a member of a weekly njangi of 2000 Fcfa, which pays out once a year. This money (80,000 Fcfa) she spends on tuition and clothes for her children4. I am astounded by the fact that she manages to survive on 1400 Fcfa (3000+400-2000=1400) at the most. Some ingredients such as oil and salt she has to buy somehow, as well as pay the rent. Furthermore she has to pay for her fare to Banso twice a week. In figures she spends weekly:

njangi 2000
travel 1200
rent 1250
food approx. 3000

According to her estimated total spendings of 6,450 Fcfa, she will be short of at least 3000 Fcfa weekly. If she cannot manage financially she borrows money from the njangi in order to pay for next year’s tuition, but this of course only holds good for one year. She has no further relatives or others who help her, and only trusts in her faith in God.

To what extent one or more fathers of her children (the youngest was born long after she divorced) also contribute to the tuition fees is not clear. It seems likely that they do contribute something, considering the large gaps in her budget. At any rate it is very clear that she has to toil away to make ends meet, like many other women in my research.

Case 3: Marianne, the unmarried meat seller

Marianne V. is an unmarried, stout woman of approx. 45 years, a mother of eight children. Two of them obtained a scholarship to university, one works in Ngaoundere, and the others attend school in Bamenda, still living at home. Marianne was born in Nso, went to school there for a few years and came to Bamenda in 1972. She lives in a rented, plainly furnished two-room house in

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4 The tuition for the primary school amounts to 4000 Fcfa, for secondary school 35,000 Fcfa and for high school 140,000 Fcfa, which makes a total of yearly school expenditures of 1,205,000 Fcfa.
a block with four other families. Behind this block is the kitchen where she cooks on a wood fire. She earns a living by selling "bush meat": meat of wild-life such as antelopes, buffalo, deer, beavers, and if none of these are available, chickens. Hunters from North Cameroon sell the game to middlemen in bulk. These traders resell it from their villages in smaller quantities (dried and speared) to women like Marianne, who in their turn cook and sell the meat in single portions. The children sell the portions at the market and in the streets, the rest she sells in a beer-bar. Trading bush-meat is illegal and subject to heavy fines if detected, so Marianne treated this subject with great caution.

Every day she buys two sticks of meat (26 pieces) for 3400 Fcfa. Tomatoes, onions, and oil cost 600 Fcfa, so that her daily expenses add up to 4000 Fcfa. If she is lucky and sells all 26 pieces of meat for 200 Fcfa each, her proceeds amount to 5200-4000= 1200 Fcfa a day. Lately, she is often left with one-third of the meat and earns only 800 Fcfa (average 5-6000 Fcfa per week). She has to pay for her own food with this income (lacking a vegetable garden, she has to buy everything at the market).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Estimated Food Costs</th>
<th>800 a day</th>
<th>5600 a week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>House Rent</td>
<td>5000 a month</td>
<td>1250 a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She participates in a weekly njangi for school fees</td>
<td>1000 a week</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total expenses weekly</td>
<td>7850 Fcfa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Marianne seems to be short of at least 1000 Fcfa a week for the most essential expenses, so that she will probably cut back more on her own food. Just like Cecilia, she cannot put money aside for clothing, medical care and loss of income in case she falls ill. Her brother helps her in a "small-small" way which enables her to keep her head just above water. She is also a member of a Roman-Catholic choir whose members help each other in times of trouble, but she would rather not appeal to them.

Various elements recur in these case studies: the emphasis on education for the children as a guarantee for a better future, for which parents go to great lengths. Education demands a large amount of money in school fees, which is saved through njangis. The importance of njangis and food production as a necessary supplement to income from trading activities are also a recurrent theme among women in Old Town.

The lack of their own education is evident, but not surprising. Of the fifty women I interviewed six had finished primary school and eight had only a few years of primary education. The others, mainly older women, had never even entered a school. Participation in adult education is increasing, though, especially by women: three times as many adult women attend school than men. This increase has everything to do with the historical backlog women and girls have had since the introduction of education in the colonial period (Cb

5 In 1984 60% of the women in Cameroon was illiterate against 46% of the men. In 1963 only 10-20% of the girls went to school (Little, 1973/ Hay & Stichter, 1984).
Another recurrent theme is the poor health resulting from poverty and working in the informal sector. Many women I spoke to had physical complaints and looked tired and sickly, far more often than men of their age. As for the family budget, there is a noticeable difference between the estimated expenses and the real, lower income. From this it is clear that a constant struggle to meet all expenses must be waged. Women find it difficult to give an account of their weekly expenses because they seem to spend per day or per need, without gaining any insight into the balance.

The social circumstances of the women in Old Town differ greatly, depending on the various ways of access to economic sources. Striking are the different situations of Mary, who can rely on the support of her husband, and the two unmarried women whose safety-nets are less reliable. Access to land also makes an enormous difference. The difference between cultivating your own food or buying it at the market might just mean the difference between marginalization or independence for some groups of women.

In the following sections I will elaborate on family ties, commerce and access to land, and verify which influence they have on the economic situation of women.

3.3. Family ties and safety-net

Theories of modernization (e.g. Little, 1973) started from the view that the polygynous household would, under the influence of modernization and westernization, break up into nuclear families consisting of husband, wife, and children. Later research showed, however, the emergence of a new type of family in towns, which is in between the extended and the nuclear family: the "famille élargie", the enlarged family (Le Bris, Marie et al, 1987), often centred around one woman. This family structure fluctuates strongly due to the coming and going and sometimes prolonged staying of brothers, sisters.

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6 Education is not always necessary in order to be successful. The most important businesswoman and female landowner in Bamenda is illiterate and only speaks pidgin English. She knows her book-keeping by heart, and teaches the women of surrounding areas how to set up business and book-keeping (See section 3.4.2.).

7 Of course there are many examples of married women who lack the support of their husbands entirely. Still, with regard to the large expenditures married men generally do contribute considerable sums.
parents, and other next of kin and friends all hoping to find a better future in town. Urban life, it seems, does not always lead to nuclearization but to bonds of solidarity by means of networks, such as the "enlarged family". Other networks are: community associations, churches and savings groups.

My research data confirm the conclusions of these authors, although I would like to add that it is precisely because of these complex family relations in the city that it is hardly possible to trace all networks and relations within one family (all the more because these relations are often unstable and variable). The "enlarged family" in Old Town is mainly centred around single women (unmarried, divorced, widowed). Of the fifty women I interviewed, twenty were married (of which five had a polygynous marriage). Thirty women, or 60% of the studied group, were unmarried:

- widows 16 (32%)
- divorced 8 (16%)
- never married 6 (12%)

Among the unmarried women, some were elderly.

Only one woman was childless, the others had between one and ten living children. Beside taking care of their own children, they also took care of children of relatives and grandchildren. These figures on marital status match developments in other places such as Douala where 60% of all women is unmarried, too (Mainet, 1985). There it is especially the more educated woman who lives either alone or at the head of a household with children, relatives or friends.\(^9\)

As far as the danger of marginalisation is concerned, it is important to establish how much they can rely on a safety-net, in other words whether they get financial support from husbands, children, lovers, or family members or friends. My data show that 20 women (14 married and 6 unmarried) receive

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8 Still, a few ideals of the nuclear family can be pointed out: the breadwinner-housewife ideology is catching on in higher educated circles, as appeared from various interviews. Especially men express this ideology. In these circles it is seen as an ideal of love if a man fully provides his wife and children so that she does not have to work outside the home.

9 Of all adult women in the district of Akwa in Douala it appeared that 12.3% was not married, 12.7% single mothers, 41.7% married (33.5% monogamously and 8% polygamously), 5.7% concubine, 13.6% divorced, and 14.7% widowed. A striking difference with my data, however, was that almost 45% of all the women in Akwa lived alone without having to take care of others. Usually, they sent their children to relatives in rural areas (Mainet, 1985).
financial support from others, in addition to the income from their own activities (see table 1). Only two women reported being fully provided for by either their husband or their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>n= 50 women</th>
<th>LAND</th>
<th>TRADE</th>
<th>OTHER FINANCES</th>
<th>LAND and TRADE</th>
<th>NONE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>married (n=20)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
<td>15 (75%)</td>
<td>14 (70%)</td>
<td>10 (50%)</td>
<td>1 (2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>widowed (n=16)</td>
<td>14 (88%)</td>
<td>11 (68%)</td>
<td>4 (25%)</td>
<td>10 (62%)</td>
<td>1 (6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divorced (n=8)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>7 (88%)</td>
<td>1 (12%)</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unmarried (n=6)</td>
<td>4 (66%)</td>
<td>6 (100%)</td>
<td>1 (16%)</td>
<td>4 (66%)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL (n=50)</td>
<td>40 (80%)</td>
<td>39 (78%)</td>
<td>20 (40%)</td>
<td>30 (60%)</td>
<td>2 (4%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

table 1: women's economic sources, related to marriage status

Six married women and 24 non-married (or divorced, and widowed) said they received no support at all, and were the sole providers for themselves, their children, and sometimes others. The extent to which some men, for example lovers, contribute in the background can only be surmised.

3.3.1. Family and matrimonial laws

African households are marriage-bound but based on female-headed units within that household, be it polygynous or monogynous (Stichter & Hay, 1984). Direct decisions on (food) production are made within such a unit, but control of resources must be viewed in the light of both unequal power relations and established family laws. Some of the changes in matrimonial laws and practices will be briefly discussed below. The next chapter will deal at more length with the various rules and practices relating to control of land.

3.3.1.1. Marriage

The most important laws are those of 7 July 1966, organizing payment of the dowry, and of 29 June 1981, concerning the Civil Status Registration. However, like the 1966 law, the more recent Ordinance is very sketchy in provisions for inheritance and tenure of property, and has to be complemented with existing Common Law principles (Melone, 1971; Fisiy, 1985). This gives rise to considerable regional variation in interpretations, especially with
regard to division of property after divorce or death.\textsuperscript{10} Matrimonial law nowadays offers a couple two possibilities for marriage:

1. Marriage under modern law, which offers a choice between communal ownership of property, all properties being equally divided in case of divorce or death, and separate property ownership (Section 49(9) of the 1981 Ordinance). In the latter legal form, which occurs very rarely, a woman is entitled to own private property.\textsuperscript{11} In polygynous households under civil law, the condition of joint control of goods and land would create many problems, because it would have to be determined which property belongs to the husband, to the co-wives together, or to the individual wives (Fisiy, 1992). Before a civil marriage takes place the couple have to decide the form of their marriage: poly- or monogamous. In practice, however, only monogamous couples seek a civil marriage.

2. Marriage under (locally varying) customary law, which often denies women the right to own private property, including possessions she herself brings into the marriage. Every possession is owned or administered by her husband, who in his turn is obliged to contribute financially to the household. In the Grassfields, it is usually only men who have the right to inherit land and properties. Most marriages in Cameroon are still contracted under customary law. These marriages are now considered concubinuous according to the new matrimonial law, and do not offer the same rights that civil marriages give. Children out of customarily established marriages have to be legalized separately if they wish to make claims to inherit. Indeed, many women insist on a civil marriage nowadays, to ensure the rights of their children. Many men, especially those wishing to contract a polygynous marriage in the future, are not very taken with this (Guyer, 1984: 71).

\textsuperscript{10} As the leaflet of MICOF (1984) states: "We can...say that the matrimonial regime is that of common law, i.e., communal. But then it is a logical interpretation of jurisprudence...subject to variations. It will be better to have a law asserting that the Common Law regime is the community of property." This holds true for the French Civil Law which interprets co-ownership of property as common law regime. British common law, however, does not recognize communal property (Fisiy, 1985/ Melone, 1971).

\textsuperscript{11} In practice, she is asked to prove her ownership with certificates or contracts of purchase. If she is not able to do so, the judges automatically assume that the entire property is her husband's (information from a Magistrate in Bamenda).
3.3.1.2. Widowhood and inheritance

In pre-colonial times women were widows for just a few months basically, i.e., only until they were inherited by their husband's successor. Then they moved to the compound and land of their new husband and had to build a new life there. Only after menopause was it acceptable for a widow to remain unmarried. Usually she continued to live on the premises of her in-laws, partly to secure the inheritance of the land for her children. Since the 1966 matrimonial law stipulated that nobody can claim a widow, whether married under customary or civil law, or her possessions (Melone, 1971), the number of widows who remained unmarried has greatly increased. They cannot expect support from their in-laws, though, and have become a vulnerable group in society. If a widow leaves her husband's land, she and her children lose their right to inherit. Only if she is married under the Civil Code, does a widow have the right to inherit her husband's property (after her children), especially the house and the fields cultivated by her. Guyer (1985) points out, however, that despite these protective rules widows still appear to be inherited by heirs, together with land and other goods. It also frequently happens in this age of selling land and commercialization that the in-laws accuse the widow of having killed her husband in order to drive her away from her home, or attempt to confiscate all the possessions of her deceased husband. In so doing they refer to customary law which denies women all ownership (Delpech, 1985/MINASCOF, 1988).

3.3.1.3. Divorce

Customarily, a woman could only divorce if she repaid her dowry. These two matters were even linked for a long time in the colonial legislation. It was only the 1966 law which stipulated that even when the divorce is the woman's fault she is still free to leave without having to repay the dowry. In some special cases, however, her family can be asked to repay the dowry. The family's refusal to do so should not restrict the divorcée's freedom to contract another marriage (Delpech, 1985). But by divorcing, a woman and her children lose their rights to the land. It can hardly be a coincidence that many of the women I spoke to moved to

12 "In the event of dissolution of a marriage as a result of divorce, the person who received the dowry may be asked to pay back all or part of the dowry if the Court feels that such a person is totally or partially responsible for the divorce" (section 73 of Ordinance 81-2).
Bamenda after getting divorced. Sometimes this was necessary to escape from family claims or because they had no longer access to family land, after which they tried to set up a business. Most of the unmarried women who have lost access to land enter the retail or middle-trade. Because they have to buy all their food in the market, their turnover has to be higher than that of women who do have access to land. Often their businesses stay marginal and just enough (or not) to make a living. Some women, however, succeed in developing a flourishing business, administering their own affairs and buying land in their own name. The latter is far more easy for unmarried women than for those who are married, as we will see below.

3.4. Commerce in the informal sector

As in most Third World cities, urban life in Old Town revolves around the informal circuit: that part of society which is not registered or controlled by the state, and which is often much larger than the formal sector. Food and drink vendors, market women, craftsmen, repairmen, drivers, domestic servants, and prostitutes cater the many needs of the urban population. The most popular saving and credit system (njangi) in which more money circulates than in the banks, is also rooted in the informal circuit. Even people with paid jobs try to earn an additional income in the informal sector in their spare time. Some activities of women in the informal sector of Old Town are described below.

3.4.1. Old Town women

At a symposium about the position of widows in Cameroon, the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs (MINASCOP, 1988) offered some insight into the national contribution of women to the informal sector. In total only 10% of women work in commerce and industry. The wholesale trade employs 91% men and only 9% women. This small share of women is due to a lack of financial means for transportation, storage and credit. Many women (83%), however, are active in the retail and middle trade. Their main occupation is selling food, which

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13 In order to stimulate the use of banks, the Cameroonian government deposits the salaries of its civil servants on bank accounts. Many civil servants, however, empty their bank accounts immediately and invest in njangis, because these are more trusted than banks. This is understandable, judging from recent reorganisations and dismissals within some important bank organisations because of fraud (Cameroon Tribune, 7-6-1989).
traditional activity also earned them respect and income in pre-colonial times. Trade in food is partly in the hands of women selling the surplus of their harvest, but especially by middlewomen (buyam-sellams). These women do not produce or their own merchandise, but only purchase and sell. Sometimes they work up before they sell, like Marianne in case 3. The buyam-sellams together form a large economic force and can agree on a price policy. Especially successful market women ("Big Mammies") pursue a tough policy which the other women have to stick to. Because of this strong power the market women are sometimes treated with envy and reticence, and do not enjoy high esteem. Moreover, they are often unmarried and regarded as "free women". Still, these saleswomen are irreplaceable in the economy.

The economic activities of the women in my research can be broken down into five categories (or combinations of these)\textsuperscript{14}:

- farming the land (for private use and/or selling) 40 women (80%)
- letting rooms 7 (14%)
- selling foodstuffs, cigarettes, cloth 18 (36%)
- preparing and selling drinks (palm wine, beer, bar) 13 (26%)
- selling prepared food (plates, fish, poff-poff) 17 (34%)

Other possible activities of urban women are sewing and prostitution. Clothing is frequently made to order, both by men and women. They sit in rows in the market or street, the most current models hanging on the wall. A disadvantage of this business is the rather high investment of a sewing-machine and textile. As for prostitution I can be brief, since I do not have much information about the number of prostitutes in Old Town. There was constant gossiping about unmarried women, who were considered by most married informants as "free women" who were said to maintain shifting relationships in exchange for money and presents. One unmarried woman put it like this: "We are all prostitutes", but others denied this vehemently.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} The earnings in the informal sector vary greatly but do not rise above 30,000 Fcfa a month for the majority of the traders. 18% of them have an income even lower than 10,000 Fcfa (Ministry of Town Planning, 1982).

\textsuperscript{15} Data on Douala show that 11% of all women in the Akwa quarter regard themselves as professional prostitutes, but also that 45% have relationships with several lovers and engage in "commerce de leurs charmes" incidentally or as a second profession (Mainet, 1985).
3.4.2. Successful businesswomen.

I interviewed seven 'successful' business women\(^{16}\) who were members of the North West Business Women's Association (N.W.B.W.A.). The N.W.B.W.A. is an association of organized female occupational groups which all delegate a representative to the meeting. The association organizes management courses, initiates income-generating projects, and has recently become a member of the Women's World Banking Group. This group grants loans for women's projects. In principle, small traders can also join the N.W.B.W.A. but they are very difficult to reach. Class differences are too big.

The contact with this N.W.B.W.A. was established through the Provincial Delegate for Social and Women's affairs. I could not find big business women within Old Town, but only outside the quarter. Two of the women I interviewed are wholesalers (in rice, yams, potatoes, and a catering business in home-made snacks), one woman is a seamstress, another is an apothecary, the next a hotel/restaurant keeper, and yet another is a trader of fish and other frozen foods. My interviews focussed on "the secret of their success", in other words: the conditions which had to be met in order to start and expand their businesses, and the problems they had to face. The most important responses during these interviews deal with family bonds, credit problems, and access to land.

Of course there is no specific formula for success, but marital status, like access to land proved to be very important to these women. Five of the seven interviewed women were married (or had been). Their husbands had (sometimes well-) paid formal jobs or had their own businesses and helped to supply starting capital. Or they supplied the basic income for the household, allowing the wife to take more risks in her business. Some of these married women and the two unmarried ones also used njangis to start or increase their capital.

As for access to land, four out of the seven women had a vegetable garden which they cultivated during the weekends as an addition to their income. Indirectly, land is also important to businesswomen: in order to obtain a loan at the bank a pledge is required, preferably a land certificate. However, many married women do not have land registered in their own names.

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\(^{16}\) My definition of 'successful' is: the ability to invest in extending the business, rather than just managing.

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even if they have paid for it with their money. 17 This means that to apply for a credit, a woman always has to ask her husband to join her as a co-
signer. In that sense lack of registered land is an obstacle to women’s investments.

The biggest problems businesswomen had to face concerned obtaining loans
through banks or Credit Unions. 18 Borrowing through njangis was far easier,
but the interest rate was much higher than at the bank. The economic crisis
which had started a few years ago also caused many problems in keeping the
business going. Only one woman mentioned her double task as a mother and
businesswoman, and complained about the lack of domestic assistance on the
part of her husband.

Case 4: A "Big Woman" of Bamenda

One of the most impressive and energetic women I met during my research was
the wholesaler V.S., 65 years, married to an independent professional. She
has seven children, all of whom have good jobs and have left home, while she
now takes care of a girl-friend’s three children.
Besides serving several political functions she is invaluable to coming
businesswomen in Bamenda as an advisor of the N.W.B.W.A. Despite her
illiteracy she gives lectures and courses to young women on budgetary control,
book-keeping, saving and credit arrangements. Furthermore she acts as a
 guarantor for wholesalers with her own capital, and grants credits to
starting female traders. In this capacity she has already founded various
cooperations, including a palm oil purchasing and food selling cooperation,
and a communal potato storage and preservation depot. She advises her women’s
group in buying land in their own names, independently of their husbands.

Mrs. S. is a "large" landowner of six large agricultural domains, of which
four are registered in her own name. They are planted with rice, bananas,
yams, and corn. In the weekends she and her children work the land; during
the week she hires groups of women who work in shifts. She sells the proceeds
in bulk at her own marketplace in Bamenda. She has a secretary who keeps the
books; not to help her memorize, but in the case of contingencies and
deputies. Her son drives her truck and transports all trading products.
She started her career with the help of her husband who financed a knitting
machine, which she also used to teach other women to knit. Moreover, she had
4 ha of land to farm, partly her father’s, partly her husband’s. With the
earnings of these combined activities she started a wholesale business in
rice and yams, and began to buy more and more land in her own name. At
present she has an annual turnover of 8 million Fcfa.

17 The president of the N.W.B.W.A. pointed out that married women have to
enter into "a small quarrel" if they wish to register land in their names.

18 Credit possibilities for business women are very restricted, because their
trade and means of investments are rather small. However, even bigger
businesswomen are refused credits because, according to my informants, a
female trader is considered unreliable to set up a flourishing business and
unable to pay back high loans.
Most traders, she says, have no overview of their earnings and expenses. They eat their own capital, that is to say they use their earnings for domestic expenses. She herself puts a fixed amount of money aside every month for domestic expenses and does not touch the rest of her profits, but invests in intricate systems of njangi and Credit Unions: "I play with two houses." She is a member of a njangi for 10,000 Fcfa a week and another for 1000 a day. After each payment (after nine weeks and one month respectively) she deposits the money into the account of the Credit Union. Thus she keeps on saving until she can contract a reasonable loan for further investments at the Credit Union.

3.5. Landownership in urban areas.

In the presented case studies I have shown how the living conditions for certain groups of women, especially heads of households without financial support by others, are bound up with the necessity to cultivate food themselves. That is why the need for land varies per group, depending on marital circumstances, class, and trading conditions.

If land used to be of vital importance to the subsistence economy and the basis for social life in former days, at present it represents many more functions. First of all, production of food and cash crops (around Bamenda especially cultivation of coffee) must be mentioned. Land is also very important for owning and letting houses as a source of income. Furthermore, banks and Credit Unions increasingly demand land property as a pledge. Finally, more than half of all the available land is used to pasture Fulani cattle, which is a continuous source of conflicts and an indirect influence on the access to land of city-dwellers.

In the next section I will examine the women's need for land and verify the connection with their pursuit for economic independence. I will deal in particular with the importance of land for food production and house building, because these are the most basic needs in town. For reasons of space I have to leave out the cattle problems, although they are serious.

3.5.1. Women's need for land

Although Claire Robertson remarks that "agricultural work is...not common in an urban situation" (see the first chapter), it appears from Champaud (1983) and my own research that approx. 80% of urban women live on food cultivation, whether or not combined with other activities such as commerce, services, or a formal job. My own research yielded the outcome that 80% of the women interviewed farmed land and that only four women had never farmed. Even the bigger business women I met nearly all had a food plot. Most of this food is
used for home consumption, so that less money need be spent on buying food and the surplus can be sold to earn an additional income.

It is seldom the case that food plots of women in Old Town are situated in the neighbourhood of their dwellings. In the early stages of Abakpa this was often the case (behind Commercial Avenue were large areas of waste lands) but once the urban expansion gained momentum, all the land was claimed to build houses and offices. Nowadays in Old Town there are many houses with only small strips of land, of which every square centimetre is used for a few plants (maize, tomatoes, cassava, beans). 30% of the women I interviewed had this opportunity around their houses.

For production on a considerable scale women have to move to areas outside Bamenda. 36% of the women had additional lands in the suburbs of Bamenda, such as Nkwen or "Up-Station". Nearly half the women, however, travelled outside Bamenda, up to Mamfe and Bafoussam (approx. 150 km away) to farm. Combinations of the various locations often occur too, because the women want to take advantage of every possibility of cultivation.

Ownership of houses in Bamenda is of vital importance to women in situations such as in Old Town, where family relations are rather unstable and variable and the number of female family heads is high. It is obvious, however, that this is not a real option for the women. Most of them depend on a land lord, husband, or relative when it comes to housing. One quart of all the houses of the studied group of women was rented (26%), while in a number of cases the house was bought by the husband (32%) or by the woman herself (6%). Furthermore, 22% of the houses were family property (owned by brother, father, or uncle) and 14% were built by first occupants.

The introduction of coffee as the main cash crop led to a change in the allocation of land and labour. Men occupied themselves fully with coffee cultivation and claimed the best and largest areas, nearby the homesteads. Food production became a matter of women only, and was relegated to the most marginal and infertile lands. Fons started selling waste lands to coffeeplanters; intially only abandoned lands, but later fallow land too. Already in the fifties Fons and family heads in Nso region bought and sold land without compensating the women concerned for their loss of land. These women had to beg land from others in distant areas where their rights were uncertain. Women also had to pay rent to lease land and had to walk up to 20 km to their fields (Kaberry, 1952).

The need for land to produce food conflicts increasingly with the use of land
for urban expansion and coffee production around the town. The large-scale trade and speculation in land further aggravates this scarcity of land. As a result, urban food producers are driven away further and further from the town, where they enter into a competition with the rural population. Even in the rural areas, large parcels of land are purchased by wealthy city-dwellers and the rural elite, who set up coffee and other plantations (Goheen, 1989). Owing to this large-scale trade in land the remaining rural agricultural areas are gradually reaching the limits of its food supply capacity.

3.5.2. Women’s acquisition of land

After this brief survey of the need for land I will present some data on the manner in which women in Old Town acquire land (see table below). I will go into the legal and political aspects of the acquisition of land in the following chapter.

An urban woman can appeal to her family or in-laws to gain access to land. If, as a result of migration or other causes, she no longer has contact with them or if there is a shortage of land, she will look for friends or acquaintances in or around the town who are willing to loan her a plot. Last but not least there is the possibility of her husband or she herself buying land.

The forty women in my study with access to farming land had followed various strategies, as shown in the table below:

| n=5  | FAM M FAM M SALE F SALE M LOAN RENT 1st OCC | TO T OVER LAP NE- VER EVER |
|------|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| 20 MAR | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | -- | 17 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| 16 WID | 4 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 2 | 18 | 4 | -- | 2 |
| 8 DIV | 2 | -- | 2 | -- | 1 | -- | 1 | 6 | -- | 2 | -- |
| 6 UNM | 4 | -- | 1 | -- | 3 | -- | -- | 8 | 3 | 1 | -- |
| 50 TOT | 15 | 4 | 7 | 6 | 12 | 2 | 3 | 49 | 9 | 4 | 6 |

Table 2: mode of acquisition of farmland, related to marriage status (f=female, m=male)
As we see, 19 women acquired land through family relations, 13 through buying (both by their husband and themselves), 12 through a loan ("begging"), 2 through renting and 3 as first occupants. For the record I would like to point out that 9 women farmed more than one plot, so that the total number of fields amounts to 49. For the sake of completeness I must also mention the other 10 women without a farm, 4 never having farmed as adults and 6 having done so in the past. Furthermore it should be noted that, besides buying farmland, one other woman and nine other husbands had bought land for housing. The various ways of acquiring access to land by Old Town women will be elaborated below.

3.5.2.1. Family land

Of old, women used to receive land through their families and, when married, through their in-laws (see Chapter Four for the customary land tenure). This still applies to nearly half (19) of the interviewed women. It is striking that 15 women (of whom 5 were married) used land owned by their own families, against only 4 using land of their in-laws (2 married and 2 widowed women). To the question why even some married women preferred land from their own families, two replied that their in-laws' land was too far away.19 Another woman's husband came from Old Town and had no access to farming land, so she had no choice other than to turn to her family. A fourth woman was married to a polygynous husband who probably could not supply enough land for all his wives. Finally there was a woman whose father had "excess of land" in Bali and which she preferred to go on farming, rather than having to get used to new soil at her in-laws.

Nowadays, it is exceptional for women to have access to land both of their own families and of their in-laws. The scarcity of land forces them to choose one of the family properties. This choice depends on the distance to family land, on the relations with and size of the family group (or rather the number of competitors). The story of Mary M. about her jealous brothers, by whom she felt forced to leave her family land and buy a plot herself, is a good illustration of pressure exerted by the family on a woman to give up her rights to family land.

The small proportion of widows who still have access to land of their in-

19 Men appear to migrate to town from farther areas than women (Clignet, 1972). I like to add that out of 50 women, only four were born in Old Town or Mankon district; the rest had migrated to Old Town either before or after marriage.
laws, and even to land of their own families (only one-eighth and one-quarter of all widows, respectively) is a confirmation of their very precarious position, which has been widely reported\textsuperscript{20}. The rest of the widows in my sample have to beg land. Lucy M., a widow, told me for example that she always had access to family land but that she had given her plot to her mother, who had run out of land. Now she only works on the land of her in-laws. According to Eyben (1983: 28) married women experience such a lack of family land, that this prevents them from leaving their husbands, through whom they have at least access to land.

3.5.2.2. Loaning of land

Striking in the survey in section 3.5.2. is the large number of plots that women (especially widows and unmarried women) beg from others. This form of land transactions is temporary (nowadays always short-lived) and makes the woman extremely dependent on how good the relationship is between loaner and beggar. I will therefore pay a little more attention to the experience of women in Old Town concerning land loaning relationships.

The element of dependence in land-loaning relationships is comparable in a sense to that in a patron-client relationship. The partner with an abundance has the right to choose beneficiaries, but also has a moral obligation to help family and friends. Often there is an intricate network of mutual loan relations. Sypkens Smit (1976) rightly points out the levelling effect of land loaning, as a result of which landowners with an abundance of land can benefit those without land and money to buy some. In this present period of land shortage this might be even more important than in pre-colonial times. It is only for income-generating activities (especially cash crop production) that this loan system is not suitable.

The procedure of begging differs from village to village, as the women told me. A woman approaches the owner of the plot she likes and asks for permission to cultivate it temporarily. In general a small compensation is expected in return. At present, fields can only be cultivated for a couple of seasons at the longest. This is especially the case when both parties are neither related nor close friends. Thus, Cecilia L. gives part of her harvest to one loaner, a few days of

\textsuperscript{20} For example, in Eyben (1983) and Guyer (1985), and section 3.3.1. of this report.
labour to another, and some others she does not have to give anything. Lydia B. begs a plot every season from different persons, and sometimes has to hand over half the harvest in return. If she has a choice she would rather not go back to such a person. Esther N. worked once for a landowner for two days (planting and weeding), after which she received her own plot which she was allowed to keep for years. When the time came for a fallow period she went to someone else. Grace N. however, has never given money or goods in return for begging land. She always has good friends who do not ask for compensation. Begging land for one or two seasons is never a big problem, as Cecilia L. says: "Beg and farm is no problem, but beg and construct is a big problem."
Women seek land through a friend, relative, or quarter head by whom they expect to be treated honestly. As a result of this Pauline A., who has been living in Bamenda for two years, has difficulty in finding land because she doesn't know many people yet.

Most women see no problems in the system of begging land, probably because they know its restrictions beforehand and take them into consideration. These restrictions lie in the fact that the still available fields are gradually situated further and further: especially in Bali and Mbengwi (25-30 km) and that only seasonal crops such as vegetables and maize can be cultivated on them. For example planting coffee or plantains is not possible because these are perennials which bear fruit for years. Moreover, by planting perennials one establishes customary rights on the land; something which landowners will try to prevent. Therefore a woman is usually not sure beforehand for how long she will be cultivating a plot. For these reasons women try to lay their hands on different combinations of family land and begged land, so that they can cultivate various crops.21

Some women admit that it was sometimes difficult to beg or lease land, or complain that they have to travel so far. They seem, however, to find it inherent in their weak position of land-loaners.22 They do not see begging

21 It is not clear whether land was only begged from friends or acquaintances (or possibly from a quarter head) or also from relatives (only one woman mentioned this; her son-in-law.) In general, using land of relatives was not regarded as "begging" but as "family land". This is contrary to the situation in Senegal where land-loaning relationships were maintained mainly among relatives (Sypkens Smit, 1976).

22 Of course it is possible that women's access to land is so precarious that they don't think it wise to give their opinion in front of a stranger.
land as a problem, whereas I think it still is an uncertain transaction to
them, which in any case affects the planning of the kind of crops. Eyben
(1983) mentions another disadvantage of begging a different plot each year,
namely that it is detrimental to durable soil conservation. The system of
begging land is for certain groups of women, especially urban women without
land, the only possibility of growing food. They are therefore reluctant to
protest.

3.5.2.3. Purchase of land

Many women in Bamenda have bought land, but exact figures are lacking. In my
research group 16 husbands and 8 women (33% of the total) had bought land,
both for building houses and agriculture. I will go into this in the next
chapter.
In former days it was very difficult to buy land, especially for a single
woman. Moreover, it was nearly impossible to register it in her own name.
Lately, coffee planters are reported to sell land to women, because of the
sharp drop in the price of coffee. Women from the lower income groups are
also said to be buying land nowadays, but unfortunately we lack concrete data
on this.

3.5.3. Legal means to acquire access to land

The innumerable conflicts about land which took place in the area during the
last decades also affected women. It becomes clear from various sources that
women already appealed to the judiciary in the case of conflicts early on.
I myself, however, spoke with only two women who had taken their matters into
court (and had won). It could be that this number is so low, because other
women did not want to give their opinion about land conflicts in front of a
stranger, or did not want to admit that they had lost the law-suit. In the
next chapter I will deal with the legal strategies of women.

3.6. Summary and conclusion

The social conditions of women in Old Town have, as individually varying as
they may be, a number of aspects in common.
Firstly, living in a poor quarter brings the residents in a position of
disadvantage, compared to better-class districts. Illiteracy and unemployment
are higher than in other areas, which diminishes the chance of finding a paid
job. This counts all the more for women, whose education is generally less than that of men and which, moreover, is seen as a threat to conjugal ethics and the labour market for men. Still, their dual responsibility as a mother and breadwinner demands, especially of unmarried women (approx. 60% of all women) that they earn a financial income for food, clothing, and education for their children. Women in Old Town mainly work in the informal sector for lack of education and jobs.

One could refer to this situation as an effect of the serious economic decline of the last years, other economic sources such as land and jobs not being available. Although profits can be low (at best some 100 Fcfa a day, often less) this is often the only source of income they have.

The economic situation of women in the informal sector is influenced by the interaction of various factors and economic sources, the most important ones being: family bonds, commerce, and land.

Family bonds influence women's striving after independence in many ways. On the one hand, being married often offers a woman some more economic security because of her husband's income; on the other, she might have to hand over control of her own finances to him. If she is not married, she has more chance of expanding her business according to her own insights. A marriage also gives a woman more access to land, since she can cultivate land both through her own family and that of her husband, although she runs the risk of losing the family land when she gets married. However, buying land in her own name is far more difficult for a married woman than for a single one.

The relation between commerce and land is also dual. On the one hand, a woman can increase her economic independence if she has a flourishing business, after which she has more possibilities to buy land. On the other, many women are obliged to set up their own business, because they no longer have access to land. The necessity to cultivate food prevents women from putting all their energy into their business, however. Conversely, a business can promote women's economic independence. Financing possibilities for women, too, depend on their (weak) credit-worthiness, which is related to their access to land and to people who can act as their guarantors.

From interviews with businesswomen who did succeed in expanding their businesses it becomes clear that both access to credit and access to land are important means to success - just like being married, in a way.

Even in urban Bamenda women have a strong need for land, although commerce and wage labour are becoming increasingly important. Except as a direct
source for the production of food (in which 70% of the urban women are engaged) and cash crops, land is important as an indirect source for the trade in exported crops, a guarantee for bank credit, and a means to acquire security of accommodation and an income from letting rooms. The land women use for food crops is sometimes situated around their yards, sometimes in the suburbs of Bamenda, but more and more often nowadays it is situated further away. Half of the women in my study had to travel for miles in order to reach their land.

Both in the need for and the access to land differences occur between groups of women, depending on their access to resources and social safety-net. Access to land has come under increasing pressure the last decades as a result of trade in land and competition with coffee cultivation and cattle-breeding.

In town, increasing speculation in land, urbanization, building of houses and offices, are causing severe scarcity of land. Consequently, women have to move further away to rural areas for the production of food. The pressure on these rural plots is also increasing, leading to many land conflicts and a growing shortage of land. This scarcity manifests itself in shortened periods of fallow, usage of land of less quality, restrictions in lending land and in the kind of cultivated crops, the paying of rent and travelling further away to cultivate food.

Especially for divorced and single women and widows access to family land has become problematic. Their options are more and more restricted to short-term land-lending practices, although their need for land is certainly no less than that of married women. Especially the position of widows, which has always been delicate, can rightfully be called alarming. On the other hand, more and more women are buying land in their own name (14% of my research population), as a result of which they can act more independently.

In the following chapter land tenure will be studied in depth from all angles, placing women's problems with land in a judicial and political context.
CHAPTER FOUR: DEVELOPING LAND TENURE

In the previous chapter I have made clear how women's economic independence is related to their access to land, and that the processes of selling and speculating in land have very negative consequences for the poorest groups of the population. In this chapter I will focus on the legal backgrounds to this development and on women's rights concerning land. Firstly, customary land tenure in the Grassfields will be sketched (par. 4.1.). The next section (4.2.) deals with the impact of colonial law on customary access to land. Subsequently I will discuss the 1974 land legislation which legalized individual land ownership. The various legal systems are very complicated in Bamenda but I will attempt to throw some light on the urban system of land administration in par. 4.3.

Section 4.4. deals with judicial strategies of women with regard to land and examines the customary valuation of their strategies, with the help of the records of the Mankon Customary Court. A survey is given of the changes in the judgements of the Customary Court in two periods (1961-65 and 1975-79), and to what extent this had to do with the changing land legislation. Finally, in section 4.5. individual land ownership will be analyzed and, in particular, how many women actually own land.

4.1. Research methods

The research material in this chapter stems partly from the records of the British colonial archives in Buea, partly from records of the Ngemba Customary Court of 1960-65 and the Mankon Customary Court of 1975-79, and partly from interviews with inhabitants of Bamenda.

Through the Divisional Officer in Bamenda I was able to gain access to the Land Judgement Books of the Mankon Customary Court (situated in Old Town), which enabled me to establish what kind of land conflicts had arisen with regard to women's claims to land, and the decisions taken in court. I went through all available files in the Books in two periods, namely 1961-1965 and 1975-1979. Of each case I established the nature of the conflict, the gender and origin of both parties, the claim and judgement. Subsequently I examined in detail all cases in which one of the parties was a woman, whether defendant or plaintiff.

A problem which arose during this research was the incompleteness of the
records. Each case had been recorded in several books, with only a page number as cross-reference. Some books were missing, unfortunately, so that parts of the records were missing and could not be retraced in a following book, as a result of the defective reference system.

4.2. General principles of land tenure in the Grassfields

Land, being the most important means of production, was the basis of the family. Moreover, land had a significant ritual value because the family head kept contact with the ancestors, the first settlers on this spot, by means of libations to the soil. To put it in the famous words of a Nigerian chief: "land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, few are living and countless numbers are still unborn" (quoted in Ngoh, 1973: 50). Land was the source of life and constituted the link between social organization and ideology (see also Melone, 1972). For these reasons, access to land was subjected to strict patriarchal control. The family was not in any way to be deprived of the basis of their existence, because "in traditional philosophy a person without land is like a living dead, like someone floating in the air, a person without a base, a tree without roots." (Anyangwe, 1984: 35).

Access to land in domestic communities was determined by rules of authority, seniority, and gender. Prominent men, family heads and village elders controlled the means of production and the labour of women and dependent men. The most common way to acquire land in pre-colonial times was to clear an area in groups or to take land by conquest (Anyangwe, 1984). Initially, land acquired in this way was owned by the community, administered by the village head or council of elders, and allocated to all needy families or individuals in the community. In due course families began to claim their domains as family property. The uncultivated fields remained in the hands of the council or village head and could be given to any member in need.

4.2.1. Land rights in Bamenda

According to the present customary law in West Cameroon every family within the boundaries of a community - usually a village - has access to land. In this section the rights to land of families, individual men, village heads (Fons) and strangers will be dealt with. Women's rights to land will be considered in a separate section.
The political and spiritual responsibility for customary land tenure in the Grassfields lies in the hands of the chief, the Fon. In pre-colonial times he administered the territory on behalf of the community, and protected the area against intruders and appropriation by strangers (Fisiy, 1986/ Kaberry, 1952). The Fon had and still has the right to distribute common lands among families and individuals, to loan land to strangers, or to confiscate land on behalf of common interests. He also settled land conflicts among residents and with other villages. He had no usufructuary rights on the domains that he administered, and could only distribute waste or abandoned lands. His ratification on land transactions between families was necessary to give them legitimacy (in the absence of written documents).

The factual land control was in the hands of family or clan heads, based on their rights of first settlement. They had rights of administration, allocation, and transaction on their domain and were obliged to distribute sufficient land among their family members to build houses and to cultivate crops. The family as a whole and the family head in particular were free to use the land for any purpose without further interference of the Fon (unless they abandoned the land or committed a serious crime). Every woman received as much land as she needed to feed herself and her children. As the children grew older and the daughters moved away after marriage, the family head would redistribute the land according to the number of sons of each woman (Nsutebu, n.d.). After a number of generations this redistribution often resulted in smaller portions of land for every member of the family. When a family-head’s land was inadequate he could try to beg land from the Fon or other family heads. When the husband died, wives, children, movable and immovable property, the land on which the houses were built, and possibly also the kola and raffia trees (although Kaberry (1952) denies it) were either divided among the sons.

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1 That this right was frequently abused is illustrated by the petition Madam Magie Mambo and eight other women lodged against Fon Ndefru of Mankon: "In the ancient days there have been wicked customs some which empowered the Chiefs to take properties, and lands from an individual by force but as civilisation comes in the country some of these wicked customs have died away." (Qg 1950-1)

2 During a law-suit in 1974 the Fon of Mankon claimed that he owned all the Mankon land and could allocate it as he thought fit. However, the Court of Appeal in Bamenda pointed out to him that he merely administered the land on behalf of the Mankon population and not in his own name (Anyangwe, 1984: 37).
or inherited by a previously selected heir.

Individuals could exercise rights of control and management of their part of family land and could inherit, bequeath, or give it away to another member of the family. The only restrictions were that they could not sell the land to an outsider, that the transactions remained within the extended family, and that the land should be used only to produce food. They always had the right to appropriate land by clearing it themselves.

Strangers who wanted to settle on common or family land had to follow a number of rules: they had usufructuary rights only and could not buy or sell the land. It was only granted to them in loan. Originally, strangers were not even allowed to build permanent dwellings or cultivate crops on this land. In times of crisis or if they did not discharge their duties in the community the land could easily be confiscated again. Moreover, they had to give part of the harvest or contribute other gifts to the family or village head as payment of rent (Meek, 1957: 383). In practice, these rules applied only in the first few years. Although strangers usually assimilated during the years, their presence often gave rise to conflicts over land, even after many generations, as will be shown in section 4.5. The claiming of equal rights to land was often out of the question, especially in areas with a shortage of land.

4.2.2. Women: daughters and wives.

Women in the Grassfields always has usufructuary and management rights to family land, depending on their relationship with a man and on their position within the family; even the number of offspring influenced their rights to land. Local land tenure varies considerably from one village to another. In some groups a married woman retained the usufructuary rights to land of her parental home and often even to family land of her mother's, provided that she cultivated this plot permanently and in compliance with the usual periods of fallow (Kaberry, 1952). In practice, this was possible only if she still lived near her parental home and if her father or grandfather had sufficient land. If there were many sons and daughters-in-law in the family, her rights to

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3 The majority of the data are derived from the Nso but the situation of the Mankon did not differ materially, according to Kaberry (1952) and Fisiy (1986). Where possible these data are amplified with my own research.
family land might be undermined again.

Only rarely could women become family heads. In the absence of adult male successors a female could be appointed as family head on a temporary basis, until one of the boys in the family reached manhood. In general, women did not own the land, only the crops they cultivated. "Men own the land, women own the crops" (id: 34). Only if a man remembered her in his will or if there were no male heirs, could a woman inherit land and acquire independent ownership of it in her own right.

The strong and indispensable position in agriculture of married women assured them of secure access to land. A woman was entitled to a reasonable portion of land, and if her husband failed to give it to her, she could claim her rights before the family or village courts. She could even sometimes inherit her mother-in-law's land, on condition that she had cultivated the said land on a permanent basis.

Women were not allowed to mortgage or sell their plots, but could loan them temporarily. They could easily beg land from other family heads and manage it for years and years, as long as there was no shortage of land. A woman could also distribute or grant the land of which she had usufructuary and management rights to her daughters or granddaughters, according to her own insights. Usually, her last will was respected by the family head unless he had valid reasons to allot the land for something else. Especially when the cultivation of coffee expanded so enormously in the fifties and sixties it frequently occurred that the family head reclaimed part of the female lands for the cultivation of coffee (Cb 1955-1). Lately, because of the increasing shortage of land, rights to loan or manage land are being restricted more and more (Goheen, 1989).

Unmarried, divorced or widowed women, however, often found themselves in an uncertain situation, in which they depended mainly on the sense of responsibility of the family head (Kaberry, 1952/ Goheen, 1989). Widows usually remarried with the heir of their late husband, and could continue working and living on their lands, also to ensure their children's inheritance. Only when they had passed menopause could they stay unmarried on the spot. If they refused to remarry, however, they had to leave their marital land and home, and return to their parental homes, just like divorced women. Childless widows also ran the risk of being sent away from their in-laws. They could only hope that their own family would take care of them again.
Women had no independent, inalienable rights which could be claimed at all times, but only dependent rights (on family of husband). Their rights were respected on moral grounds, or to put it in the words of Kaberry (1952: 40): "The concept of ownership has moral as well as legal connotations; it involves trusteeship and responsibility", but the family head had the formal right to decide otherwise if necessary. This discrepancy in rights was especially manifest in times of land shortage or commercial usage of land, as we will see below.

4.2.3. Transactions in land

An individual was allowed to loan or grant his plot of family land but never to sell it to an outsider. In doing so he would decrease the family property and rob the future generation of land and livelihood. This inalienability rule did not apply to the family or village community (Anyangwe, 1984). In pre-colonial times a piece of land could be sold with the permission of the entire family, even to a stranger. This did not occur frequently because ritual objections against selling were strong. The village had often been founded by the ancestors, who had, as it were, entrusted the land to the present and future generations. Since the fifties, however, selling land has become common practice around Bamenda.

Land was often loaned or granted to other members of the family or community. The loaning/begging transactions were confirmed by gifts of food or drink and after the harvest often a basket full of maize. Married women were also entitled to loan or beg land from others. In the old days it was not very difficult to beg land from friends, even for an indefinite period of time, because there was sufficient uncultivated land in and around Bamenda. My informants said that they even could build a house without having to return the land: "They dashed you the land." The extent to which one could beg land depended on how much land was available, and on the goodwill and plans of the loaner or family head. Often a network of intricate mutual loaning relationships came into being, which connected all members of a community. One-sided relationships of dependency were thus avoided.

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4 This also means that a person who bought family land could never be a legal owner since the person who sold it had no absolute claim to landownership himself (Anyangwe, 1984).
Although the beggars knew that their property was only temporary, in practice they exercised full control of it and could even bequeath their management rights to their heirs, as long as the proprietors did not need the land themselves (Anyangwe, 1984). There was a risk, however, that the land would be regarded as permanent property of the begging family because of long-term cultivation, especially when after a few generations the witnesses of the transaction had died. During the fifties and after, the Fon and family heads had to be constantly on the alert to prevent this (Kaberry, 1952). From the view of the beggar who had been living and working for so long on the plot, however, it was only reasonable to be given permanent rights of ownership without running the risk of being dispossessed.

Customary land tenure in the Grassfields made a distinction between rights to products obtained by exploitation of the soil, and rights to the land itself. The owner/manager of land could grant the right of exploitation and usufruct to someone else, which sometimes led to conflicting and confusing situations. This distinction, which held good for loaned land, too, became of utmost importance after the production of coffee intensified. Coffee plants demand permanent labour and investments, and lead to long-term and permanent occupation of the soil. Coffee planted on loaned land was withdrawn from the owner's control for long time. Gradually property rights to the products (i.e. coffee) were transformed into the planter's property rights to the land itself (Rowling, 1948/ Kouassigan, 1982). Therefore, Fons were reluctant to permit outsiders to cultivate coffee or cocoa on common lands, or drove them away as soon as such appropriation was noticed (Meek, 1957: 396). In the sixties, however, the importance of commercial agriculture and "mise en valeur" was increasingly acknowledged by authorities and courts, as will be shown below.

Another frequently occurring land transaction was the pledging of land, that is to say giving it in use in return for a loan of money, or goods, or to pay off a debt. This practice was allowed for a family or village head (not for an individual) with the permission of the families concerned. 5 Initially only

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5 Kaberry is under the impression that pledging did not take place but Rawlings (1948: 20) brought forward evidence from court records which proved that pledging demanded a particular ceremony in which a fowl was killed and its feathers were kept. This ceremony was necessary, according to him, for the new user of the trees to, as it were, obtain the key to his ancestors who would then protect him and grant him abundant crops. The feathers may have served as a sign of the temporality of the pledge.
trees were involved, but later also land was involved in pledging. In the fifties it was more usual that the one who had received the trees or land in pledge would refuse to accept repayment of the loan, and thus would in fact try to buy the land permanently instead of keeping it as a pledge. Rowling (1948: 32) also observed a new trend in which interest was charged for the pledging of trees and land, to be paid to the pledgee. This can be regarded as an increasing monetarization of social relations. The usufruct of these trees was regarded as a payment of interest on the debt or loan in former days.

The increasing trade in land, mentioned several times in this report, will not be treated here in detail. Since the fifties, selling family land has become a very common practice in and around Bamenda, and is leading to a serious shortage of land for food production. Especially women's rights to loan and beg land are slowly disappearing due to this shortage of land. Nowadays the loaned, exhausted land which has to lie fallow for a certain period is also far more often reclaimed by the landowner for cash crop production (Goheen, 1989). This induces women to reduce the period of fallow from fear of losing their land.

4.3. Impact of national land legislation

In this section I will briefly sketch the most important judicial changes in customary land tenure as a result of the introduction of colonial and post-colonial legislation. In order to get a clear picture of the post-colonial land politics throughout the decades and the degree to which women could profit from these politics, a thorough examination in the relevant ministries would be required, which unfortunately exceeded the limits of my period of research. Another obstruction was the scarcity of governmental reports on the past few years which I could lay hands on. Out of sheer necessity this section has become a mere outline, in which many aspects remain undiscussed.6

4.3.1. Land and Native Rights Ordinance

The Germans brought about a thorough transformation of customary land tenure

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6 As this report deals only with Anglophone Cameroon, the French legislation will not be taken into account. For a comparison of the two legal systems see Manga Fombad, 1991.
by means of colonization and large-scale expropriation of common lands. The result was that the indigenous peoples (mainly on the coast and at the foot of Mount Cameroon) lost the absolute ownership of their ancestral territory. Due to their contacts with European traders and the gradual monetarization of the economy, together with these expropriations, these peoples began to view their ancestral lands as alienable and marketable goods. Trade in land - at first waste bush, later also family lands - came into being.

Meanwhile the British had already enacted land legislation in India and Nigeria, and in 1925 they declared this legislation, the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of Northern Nigeria, applicable to British Cameroon. The British assumed that cash crops (coffee, cocoa) could best be produced within the local forms of land tenure, adapted to the commercial needs of European planters and enterprises. This law remained operative in Anglophone Cameroon until 1974. The 1925 law stipulated:

"the whole of the lands of West Cameroon, whether occupied or unoccupied are hereby declared to be native land", except the 84 foreign rural estates in south-west Cameroon (Ngoh, 1973: 53). The native lands would be administered by the Governor "for the use and common benefit of the natives".

Existing customary rights to indigenous land were guaranteed by law, but they were reduced to rights of usufruct and management. Transactions between indigenous people were allowed as long as they conformed with "Native Law and Custom" and had the consent of the village head. This situation was identical with that before 1925.

Transactions with strangers, even pledging and loaning, were forbidden unless special permission was given by the Prime Minister. Strangers, especially foreign companies, could obtain statutory use rights by applying to the Governor for a Certificate of Occupancy, and could develop the land in payment of an extremely low rent to the government (UNTC, 1951). Some Cameroonians applied for a Certificate of Occupancy, too, by which they lost their customary land rights. Then they became leaseholders and had to pay rent to the government (Nforti, 1984). The advantage of a Certificate of Occupancy was the written confirmation of transactions. Banks and investors tended to accept

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7 This regulation was very disadvantageous to the native population, according to Ngoh (1973: 57) because they were used to leasing land to strangers on payment of a rent which benefited themselves, rather than the government.
only these certificates as proof of ownership (as pledge for a loan or investment).

In practice, the new legislation had little effect on the dealings in land among villagers and between strangers, which were largely concentrated in the urban areas. The newly accepted practice of buying and selling land to foreign companies as well as indigenous Cameroonians did not take any notice of the legislation at all. Nearly all the lands in Western Cameroon, except for the areas which fell under a Certificate of Occupancy, belonged to the category of "native lands" and were controlled by customary rules (Nforti, 1984: 75). In the sixties it became common practice in the urban areas, though, to draw up a written deed of purchase and apply for an approved development plan as a precaution against future claims of ownership. The few certificates which were issued went to missionary posts, business enterprises and plantations (Cb 1958-1).

The law had even less impact on women's access to land, because their customary use and management rights continued to exist. Only some exceptional women, traders or officials applied for a certificate for their land or compounds.

4.3.2. The 1974 land legislation

As has become clear from the above, the Land and Native Rights Ordinance proved to be an unsuitable expedient in meeting the increasing need for individual landownership. After all, the ultimate advantage one could obtain through this law was the right of occupancy: management and use rights. After the reunification with French Cameroon, where individual landownership was possible, the two different land tenure systems had to be harmonized in a new legislation as from 1974.

Ordinance 74-1 (and further legislations) introduced the concept of individual land ownership through registration of title in Land Consultative Boards. The aim of this legislation is to privatise landed property, and to guarantee property rights to farmers in order to increase agricultural development. The rationale behind this policy is that every member of society should be freed from restrictive kinship bonds which hinder individual ownership of property (Fisiy, 1992). The law does not differentiate between social categories,
assuming equal access to land for every Cameroonian, male and female. The law acknowledges three types of land:

- **state lands**: all public and private property of the state; land for public services, roads, buildings. The law stipulates as artificial public property of the State:

  "The concessions of traditional Chiefdoms and property relating thereto and more especially in the provinces where the concession of Chiefdoms is considered as the joint property of the community, the Chief having only the enjoyment thereof." (Ordinance 77-2, art.4)

- **private lands**: land for which titles are granted and are registered in land books. Land titles are the only recognized evidence of property and can be obtained in two ways: by registration of existing certificates of Occupancy (mostly owned by foreign organisations or planters) or by registration of customarily tended land, now called "National Lands".

- **national land**: all customarily tended land without title, occupied or unoccupied. These lands constitute the common patrimony of the nation and are now administered by the state, guardian of all lands. The state becomes the only landlord and entrusts the management to Land Consultative Boards, which are entitled to allocate these lands through grants, leases or assignments. By the mere paying of a registration fee, indigenous individuals or communities can apply for land certificates on village or family land, on condition that they occupied the land before August 5, 1974.

  "Provided that customary communities, members thereof, and any other person of Cameroonian nationality, peacefully occupying or using lands in category 1 as defined in Article 15, on 5 August 1974 (= National lands, occupied) shall continue to occupy or use the said lands. They may apply for land certificates in accordance with the terms of the decree provided for in Article 7." (Ordinance 74-1, art.17)

What new status can now be attached to customary rules and rights on land? The law is very vague on this point. Not a single decree deals with the position and interests of chiefs and lineage heads. All customary lands which used to be under their control became part of the "National Lands" from 1974 on, and are managed by the Land Consultative Board. The implicit "legal centralist" (Griffiths, 1986) approach assumes that all customary rights will gradually cease to exist. The practice of legal pluralism makes clear, however, that customary law cannot simply be abolished by law, although it interacts or conflicts with the national legislation. The Cameroonian lawyer Nforti states:

  "Since our present land legislation does not make registration of title compulsory, it is submitted that all unregistered lands in the holding of customary communities or their members continue to be subject to and
held under customary law since statute law cannot apply to them so long as they remain unregistered." (Nforti (1984: 76), my emphasis)

Gradually the Land Consultative Boards (in which Fons form a minority alongside the state bureaucrats) are functioning more adequately and are taking an active role in land allocation, even in resolving land conflicts. They are taking over the Fon’s task, especially in the urban areas. Until now, rural communities hardly ever apply for registration of their customary lands with Land Consultative Boards, because of the precarious relationship with chiefs. However, as soon as that family land is registered as individual property, any customary right or procedure loses its legal value (Anyangwe, 1984). Indeed, recent data show that a new bureaucratic elite is applying family land in individual names. In a relatively short period they have appropriated large areas of family land for commercial farming or for speculation, often at the expense of food production and women’s use rights (see Fisiy, 1986,1992/ Goheen, 1989).

4.4. Land allocation in Bamenda

In the foregoing I have already mentioned land dealings under customary law. With the growing shortage of land and the rise of the monetary economy during the fifties the nature of these transactions changed, yielding a lucrative source of income out of land: rent was asked for the begging and pledging of land, and attempts were increasingly made to convert the temporary transactions into permanent sale. Selling to strangers was accepted, and even double sales were not avoided. The loan-rights to strangers were restricted, and people were even chased away from their begged land.

This situation existed especially in the urban areas, where the shortage of land first presented itself and the monetary market was firmly entrenched. Bamenda was no exception. In this section I will examine the various elements of urban land tenure and the position taken therein by the government, in particular the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing.

Urban land tenure as it has developed in the big cities is based on three

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6 While much has been written about indigenous rural land tenure, little information is available about the much more intricate legal systems in an urban setting, except for a number of studies on the slums quarter of New Bell in Douala (Haeringer, 1973/ Mainet, 1986). Processes of urbanization in secondary towns such as Bamenda have only been studied in terms of socio-
competing legal systems (Tribillon, 1982). Firstly, colonial and post-colonial legislation based on Roman law. Secondly, the administrative practice (town-planning) which tends to devise its own rules. Thirdly, the urban land tenure is also determined by the customary institutions (the Fon, village, quarter, and family councils).

The first system, land legislation, has been described in the previous section. I will deal below with government policy in town, in particular that of the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing and with customary tenure, in particular of the Fon. Finally, I will try to establish in what way the population makes use of this pluralistic legal situation.

4.4.1. Town Planning

The fast growth and development of the town goes hand in hand with spontaneously developed slum quarters, in which newly arrived migrants settle. Lacking money to rent a house, they build houses on land of which the ownership is frequently unclear. The city council, in turn, does not devise development plans for these quarters. As a result, many cities have dual structures: a legal part of the city with planned urban expansion and infrastructure and an illegal part, not planned and lacking the most important facilities (Tribillon, 1982).

This illegal way of settling is a thorn in the flesh of many urban developers of the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing, because their legislation with regard to land and construction is disregarded. They would prefer to tear everything down immediately (as they actually did in Douala and Yaounde). I have no specific data on Bamenda but it seems to me that here the conflicts are not as enormous as in Douala and Yaounde.

According to an official at the Ministry of Town Planning the department's aim is to create a coherent infrastructure (electricity, water, sewage, roads) in geographical aspects and not in terms of "le problème foncier" (Schilder, 1988). Although the volume of Le Bris, Le Roy et al (1982/1986) offers a number of interesting articles, they deal mainly with conflicts between the state and populations of slum quarters, but little information is available about the impact of urban land management on women.

9 Some public services tend to regard all constructions built without their permission as illegal, even if all planning regulations have been taken into account.
an efficient and centrally planned way. The main problem is, however, that nearly all the land in the urban areas is privately owned and is often even claimed by several persons and institutions. All have their own plans with the land, which naturally do not always match the ideas of the urban developers. Nor is the issue of land certificates subject to the regulations of the Ministry of Town Planning. In this official's view the city council has to reserve and develop land for the poorest town-dwellers through facilities such as "site-and-services-schemes"\textsuperscript{10} and building grants. Unlike this official, his colleague in Bamenda holds the view that the task of Town Planning is not centralized planning of the urban areas but merely on planning behalf of individual landowners.\textsuperscript{11} Indeed, I have not noticed any planning activities in Old Town: everybody built or cultivated land as they saw fit.

As for urban agriculture, the state policy is that the town is reserved for accommodation and only the periphery can be used for agriculture. The government has forbidden urban agriculture for years on end, because it was thought to be unhygienic and attracted a lot of mosquitos (Nsutebu, unpubl.). Of course there is small-scale agriculture around the houses and on open fields in the centre. In the suburbs, which still have that particular rural character, one finds plenty of fields with food intercropped with cash crops. As urbanization continues these fields will also disappear, unless protective measures are taken which benefit urban women.

4.4.2. Customary urban land tenure

During the fifties the \textit{Fons} of Mankon and Nkwen played a remarkable role in urban land policy, according to the documents found in the archives. If a stranger bought land in Bamenda without asking the then \textit{Fon} of Mankon for permission, he or she ran the risk of having to return it one ill-fated day. The \textit{Fon} exercised his customary rights as legal manager of the Mankon lands, according to which selling land without his consent was regarded as theft (Akonumbo, 1971). In that case the buyer would lose his money or land to the

\textsuperscript{10} Municipal land on which the most elementary infrastructure is installed and on which migrants can gradually build accommodation.

\textsuperscript{11} If a person has a large plot he or she can ask Town Planning to develop an allotment plan, a lay-out for infrastructure, and divide it into smaller plots of approx. 300 m$^2$. These can then be sold for 4-500,000 Fcfa a piece (urban prices).
Fon. All this was to prevent permanent landownership of strangers. While this course of action might have been correct according to customary law, for a fast-growing town with many immigrants it was an obstruction, as the colonial rulers noticed (Ab 1951-1). The comment of the Districts Officer to the Fon is clear on this point:

'This town which is of general importance to the whole province will not be your private property...Your attempt to apply native law and custom with regard to house property is almost beyond comment. You must realize that to maintain your right to vacated houses and to suggest that the ownership of even occupied houses will devolve on you after a period of years, is to stultify progress and to perpetuate a shanty town of crumbling, temporary houses...Thus native law and custom is not in the least applicable to the situation that exists below the Bamenda escarpment ("Abakpa").' (Ab 1951-1).

In the eyes of colonial rulers customary law was not equipped for urban relations with permanent settling of foreigners and selling of land. After the new land legislation of 1974 the legal basis for the Fon's course of action was formally dropped, but even nowadays he has the right to appropriate family or private land (if it lacks a certificate) for his own or common use, according to my informants. He could even sell this land to others at a later stage.¹²

Still, customary land tenure plays an important part in an old urban quarter such as Old Town, especially with regard to the practices of begging land and first settlement. An inquiry by the Ministry of Town Planning and Housing in 1982 showed that 52% of the land in Old Town is privately owned, and that two-thirds of the owners has a certificate of ownership. That is twice the urban average. Many people of the early migration wave in the twenties and thirties still live in Old Town. They have developed the land as first occupants or were allocated land by the Fon of Mankon. Nowadays they (or their heirs) regard themselves as the owners of the land and the houses thereon. In Old Town 55% of the owned land comes from this form of inheritance or donation and 38% from sales. As a result of the 1974 legislation these first settlers or their heirs can apply for a certificate, but it is obvious that especially the poorest and the illiterate have never heard of this possibility and run the risk of losing their usufructuary rights on the land.

¹² Unfortunately I was not able to meet the Fon of Mankon and ask for his position in land tenure today. He is a main member of the Land Consultative Board, which issues land certificates. See section 4.5.1.
4.5. Land conflicts and administration of justice

We have already seen how land-loaning rights are coming under great pressure as a consequence of the purchase of land. The transaction of selling itself also creates considerable problems. Because of the increasing prices, land was sometimes sold twice if it was not developed fast enough. This led to lawsuits between the first buyer and the original land owner or between the first and second buyer. Especially in Mankon dramatic law-suits occurred "where the Mankon man regards his portion of land as a treasure from which he can draw money every time that he has need for money" (Akonumbo, 1971:94), as we will see in the records of the court below. In the next paragraphs I will deal with these conflicts more extensively.

Before going into the jurisdiction of the Customary Court, I will give a short review of its origin and operation in general, on the basis of the many records of colonial officers who complained of their disfunctioning. Of course their bias has to be taken into account.

4.5.1. Establishment and operation of Native and Customary Courts

As indicated in the second chapter, the Native (or since the fifties Customary) Courts were established in 1916. The first tribunals consisted partly of paramount chiefs (the big Fons) and partly of chiefs-in-council, i.e. chiefs advised by a council of village heads and notables. They were controlled by a District Officer and assisted by one or more clerks and an interpreter if necessary\(^\text{13}\) (Elias, 1962: 275). There were also a small number of 'leading women' in the Ngemba Native Court.

Throughout the years the courts suffered from increasing malfunctioning, mainly because the prestige and regular income attracted many, sometimes incapable members. Training programmes and repeated re-organisations were necessary to improve functioning. Thus, a number of chosen members were added (a woman and an educated man), and the number of traditional members was reduced in 1949. Later the number of judges was reduced to five, and it became common practice to appoint staff members from among District Officers or from

\(^{13}\) Often these clerks were the only Africans in court who had received a short training and had some knowledge of the British legislation. As a result, they enjoyed great influence and respect, sometimes even more than Fons and judges.
higher courts as judges (since they were already acquainted with legal procedures) to replace Fons. The latter had to occupy themselves more with local and regional politics.

There two possibilities of appeal after a judgement of the Customary Court: through the customary way and the modern British way. In the latter, the Magistrate's Courts formed the basis of the hierarchy, and the Supreme Court being the highest court. Every higher court is a court of appeal to a lower court. Next to this national legislation the Customary Courts were also divided into four increasing degrees of authority (depending on the maximum penalty or imprisonment) and a Customary Court of Appeal. Furthermore there was always a possibility (usually eagerly seized) to apply for reconsideration of the judgement at the District Officer's (E 1949: 2). Appeal to a decision in land cases made by a District Officer lay with the High Court (Alliott, 1962: 80).

In 1955 it was laid down by law that the "modern" courts of justice (Magistrate's and High Courts) were not allowed to exercise first jurisdiction in conflicts about land. This was reserved for the Customary Courts (Nforti, 1984). Only in the case of appeal were these courts allowed to pass judgement on matters concerning land. In situations where jurisprudence was still absent the "modern" law-courts generally followed the verdicts of the lower Customary Courts "if it is not barbarous or otherwise against natural justice or any valid local law" (Elias, 1962: 30). The Customary Court Ordinance of 1948 restricted the Customary Courts judgements to conflicts concerning marriage, inheritance and land.\(^{14}\) As from 1974 the conflicts about land have also been removed from their jurisdiction.

Regarding the character of the claims in the Customary Court an interesting shift can be observed in Kom (Nkwii, 1976: 102). In the twenties and thirties these claims concerned mainly the wife and children of a deceased man, but from 1940 on an increase of claims on land instead of on persons was noticed. This tendency was also noticed in the area around Bamenda from the forties onwards (Ba 1942-2). Not only did the conflicts about land become more and more numerous over the years, they also became increasingly intricate through

\(^{14}\) Matters such as murder, corruption, rape, kidnapping, treason, agitation, and forgery had to be referred to the modern courts of law (Nkwii, 1976: 196).
the many transactions.
The judges of the Customary Court in the Victoria Division (Southern Cameroon) approached the conflicts about land rather pragmatically. They often distributed the land among the contending parties and established new boundaries, even if "native law and custom" would not allow it. They acted on the basis of the presence of exported crops (especially raffia trees and coffee and cocoa plants) and not on the basis of the original customary law, which was supposed to protect family or village land against appropriation by a third party. "No question of custom or traditional tenure is ever at issue". Rowling remarks (1948: 19).

4.5.2. Research in Mankon Customary Court

In this I will describe which women appeared in court in two periods (1961-65 and 1975-79) and what the nature of their conflicts was. Furthermore, the views of the Mankon Customary Court will be traced with regard to women and their conflicts, and the changes in their judgements.

4.5.2.1. Nature of parties and claims

In the available Land Judgement Books\(^\text{15}\) of 1961-65, 154 court cases were recorded, those of 1975-79 counted 240 cases. In a small number of these, women are one (or both) of the parties, and they are more often defendants than they are plaintiffs. The table below (fig. 3) gives a survey of the share of women as plaintiffs or as defendants in comparison with the total number of court cases in these two periods.

Little more can be said about the family circumstances of the women (because these were not registered consistently in the records) than that both married women and widows are mentioned relatively often, and that unmarried or divorced women rarely occur in the records. In some cases I was able to deduce the civil status of women, because there was mention of "my husband" or "my deceased husband".

\(^{15}\) Quite a lot records were missing from the files of the Mankon Customary Court. This posed an extra problem because every law-suit was described in at least two, but usually four to six books. Whenever one book was missing in the series it was impossible to trace the continuation of the case in another book, as date and number references were lacking.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>period</th>
<th>number of cases</th>
<th>gender plaintiff</th>
<th>gender defendant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>f</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1965</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1975-1979</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase</td>
<td>86 (+56%)</td>
<td>79 (+53%)</td>
<td>7 (+115%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3: Nature of Parties in Land Conflicts

These data show clearly that the proportion of female plaintiffs rose from 3.9% to 5.4%, while that of female defendants decreased slightly from 10.4% to 9.6%. Relatively more women took their matters to court in the second period, although they are still vastly outnumbered by males. In both periods more women acted as defendants than as plaintiffs.

4.5.2.2. Nature of the Conflicts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claims of Female Plaintiffs</th>
<th>'61-65</th>
<th>'75-79</th>
<th>Claims against Female Defendants</th>
<th>'61-65</th>
<th>'75-79</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title on Land</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title +trespass</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Title +trespass</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage, no title</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Damage, no title</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Miscellaneous*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n=6</td>
<td>n=13</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>n=16</td>
<td>n=23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Nature of Claims in Land Conflicts of Women

* Miscellaneous: double sale
  attempt to sell pledged land
  returning of purchase money to get back land

From this survey on the nature of the land conflicts of women it appears that claims for title of ownership, usually coupled with trespass or crop damage, were the most frequent ones. Most of the claims for title on land concerned the customarily tended family or communal land. These claims of ownership derived from various land transactions, such as loaning, pledging, renting, or selling.

In the period 1965-69 women were summoned more often because they had
trespassed and had cultivated the land in dispute against the will of the plaintiff. The reasons why women thought they were in the right (and according to the court in fact were sometimes) again had to do with the different opinions about agreements on boundaries and land transactions, especially loans. In both periods women were summoned as farmers and cultivators of the land instead of the real owners, as illustrated by the following dialogue between a woman and the plaintiff (case 47/75): "I am wife to defendant who is the right person to defend the land and not me, do you agree? - Yes, but you farmed the place."

The period of 1975-79 was marked by intricate transactions involving women. The claims against women speak volumes (see table 4, miscellaneous): taking back money (meaning that the plaintiff did not acknowledge the sale and wanted his land back), refusing to accept money for a sold plot (meaning that the summoned woman did not acknowledge the sale of her land) and various accusations concerning the resale of land to a third party. I will give some example of problems concerning inheritance or transactions below, after discussing the reaction of judges to claims by women.

The views of the judges of the Customary Court concerning the rights of women were not unambiguous. On the one hand claims of ownership by women were declared non-suited on various grounds, such as:

"Defendant is a woman and has no right to title to any land. A male can successfully do it." (case 66/61)

"In this case Plaintiff is a woman and has no right to title over the land. She never won title over it, she is not entitled to claim for title according to our custom" (case 175/62)

"She is a wife to Defendant. She is regarded a subordinate" since only men can dispute about land.

"We have to non-suit this case because the Plaintiff and Defendant are housewives and they cannot claim title to land" (case 72/64). In other cases women’s claim to title was reduced to rights of usufruct.

In the seventies it was no longer considered unusual for a woman to claim a title, although it continued to be unsuitable for married women. This is reflected in the following exclamation by a judge: "What is the sense of acquiring your own plot and making an agreement in your own name??" In no case, however, was a "real" land title granted to women, except for some
legacies and contracts of sale. There were also witnesses, other parties, or the woman herself who pointed out to the court that a woman could not claim a title. In these cases the court agreed and refused to grant titles to the women involved. I suspect that there was little clarity among the parties and the court about the rights women could claim, and that everybody interpreted these rights to their own benefit. Another woman defended herself against a claim of a man in these words: 'My husband is the chief and Plaintiff would have taken his action against him, for a woman has no title over a land. I am not a harlot where people can begin to sue me to court. I have a husband.' She proudly expressed the status and protection which she enjoyed as the wife of a village head.

Conflicts about inheritance

Double or even more multiple claims to family land were often taken to court by various members of a family, to decide who had most rights. Usually the deceased had previously appointed a successor to administer and allocate the land, but it also occurred that others disputed this choice. A common problem was that of a verbally agreed land transaction. Without written documents the facts might be forgotten after one or two generations. The younger generations are unaware of all the ins and outs of the matter and all parties think they are in the right. Sometimes all of them are right, because they are asserting different types of rights to the same plot.

In the sixties there were few cases of women inheriting land (this was only possible in the name or absence of male heirs or through an explicit legacy) but there were women who owned raffia bush, usually through an inheritance. Sometimes women's right of inheritance to their father's land was disputed by others, e.g. in case 38/63 by a neighbour. This man claimed that the land had been loaned to the defendant by his mother on a temporary basis. His own witness declared, however, that the land was family property of the woman. In the second period women laid more claims to (and sometimes also received) the

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16 In the period 1975-79 there are only three cases in which a woman has bought a plot in her own name (106/75, 13/78 and 1/78).

17 Thus, in one of these cases the construction of a main road by the Germans is referred to as the beginning of a conflict, which must have been going on for at least 45 years.
inheritance of their father. A good illustration is case nr. 18/78, in which a woman was her father's heir and summoned his solicitor because he refused to hand over her land.

**Inheritance rights of widows**

I found some striking cases of widows faced with the threat of dispossession of their deceased husband's land. Widows' usufructuary rights depended on the relation with their in-laws, and were rather weak. In some cases in-laws tried to expel the widow from her land, as in case 1 below. These attempts were notable, both directly as court cases and indirectly within some testimonies, as in the following statement by a widow:

"Regarding the fence on this area, it was built by my husband merely to separate my own house so that when he should die his relatives [could] not take it from me."

**case 1: The widow who destroyed the crops**

In 1961 John H. started a case against Anna A., accusing her of "trespassing a boundary of land allocated to Plaintiff by Defendants husband; farmed Plaintiff's farm, cleared valuable and damaged Eucalyptus plants value at £5, all totals £16 in Santa Mbu as from 31/7/61." He stated:

"I came to Santa in 1944 and met the husband of Def. alive. I was his [He was my...] favourite and he gave me a portion of land from his land. It was a farm land to another woman and not Def. The farm was of one of his wives' own, named Debora N. He begged her to give me and she agreed. It was given me to own it permanently. I was in usage until he died with no interference. He died and Def. started damaging my crops on the farm." (my emphasis)

The dispute was settled out of court, but Defendant kept on destroying the crops and boundary trees. After the plaintiff had added more eucalyptus (boundary trees) and cleared the farm in August 1961, Anna trespassed and removed them, and started farming the area cleared by him.

Anna, the defendant, rejected his view of the transaction:

"The farm was given Plaintiff by me...(demarcated with "gum" trees) When my husband died I left home and on my return I met Plaintiff extending to my own part. He planted eucalyptus trees and I reported to Forgabe's Quarter Council and he was asked to remove his plants by himself to his side. He never did so and I had to enter the farm he cleared. I want the Court to inspect the land."

Apparently she assumed that she had lent land to John only temporarily. To her, the boundary trees he started planting were a sign of appropriation, to which she had to react. Unfortunately she had not brought any witnesses to confirm her story.

John's witness, the Quarter Head Forgabe, stressed the definitive character of her gift and stated:

"The land in question was given Plaintiff by the present defendant, not by her husband. Both parties are not truthful. There is a document prepared for that gift which is to be exhibited in court."

Even without inspection the Court concluded that John had rightfully
appropriated the land.
"The land is fully occupied by Plaintiff 5 years ago. We are satisfied that Parties had been in full agreement before [the planting of] various economic trees were planted by Plaintiff. Consequent upon the fact that the land was given Plaintiff in good faith, Defendant is wrong to have gone into the land to farm and to uproot his plants. Obviously in farming Plaintiff's trees were destroyed. The labour afforded by Plaintiff in clearing it deserves a compensation (£ 5)."
After this decision Defendant started a negotiation outside the court once more. In a "peace-making meeting" all parties agreed that John, who appeared to be a relative of Anna, was granted the land in dispute. In return he withdrew his claim for payment of compensation.

From John's first statement we can learn an interesting aspect of negotiation within a marriage: the husband who had given land to his wife (Anna?) had to beg her to give a portion of that land to John, "to own it permanently". Also, we see two opposing views of this transaction: as a gift and as a loan (which may be reclaimed). The apparent reason why Anna entered John's land immediately after her husband had died, was fear that she would loose her rights on this land. Her fear was justified, because she lost the plot by court decision, as the plaintiff had planted the land with permanent trees and crops.

On the other hand we found a few cases in which widows could successfully claim their husband's land. A typical example is the following.

**case 2: The woman who was sued to accept money**

One widow, Monica N., was summoned in two simultaneous cases in 1975 to leave her land.
The (male) plaintiff in the first court case explained:
"I have sued the Defendant to come and receive 10,000 frs being money I got from Defendant and her late husband for my land and raffia bush pledged. The pledge transaction was between me and the Def. and her husband and also my late brother, Wara...six years ago. I later got def.'s money and called def. to come and get it but she wouldn't...Defendant came and said that he (her husband) bought the land and raffia bush from my late brother Wara."

A Court question put to this man: "Is there no other person to prove that it was a pledge and not sale of the area?" soon showed that no one had witnessed this transaction. The defendant Monica declared:
"I know the place in dispute to be that of my late husband Njoya. He bought the place from late Wara N. There was traditional feasting always marked with roasted fowls, drinks, and of course enough food for those concerned...My late husband exploited the area...and later died and then I took over. As time went on I planted eucalyptus trees at (as a) boundary from my raffia bush...These plants were later uprooted and only those at the middle of the raffia bush were left. I investigated from my boundary man Joseph N. who claimed ignorance. He too later entered my own portion and was tapping it (raffia palm trees for palm
wine) also. He threaten that if I don't surrender the portion he was interfering with, he would call Pt[t to come and claim the whole area. I took the matter to quarter arbitration and won him."

As there were witnesses who could confirm the feasting, which was only held for a sale (and not for a pledge), Monica was granted the land. At the same time she was summoned in another case, concerning another part of her terrain. It had been trespassed upon and damaged by her neighbour, the said Joseph N., who claimed title to the land. Again, Monica and her husband were said to have had the land on pledge from the plaintiff's family, but, again, evidence clearly showed that the land was bought and the widow was put in the right. The judge sighed:

"The plaintiffs have collaborated to seize Defendant's land and raffia bush from two angles just because she Defendant has lost her husband--and her means of defence is looking limited....The Court after exhausting time to search of this case, came to the knowledge that the case against Def. is weak, lacking material or ingredients...The Court will not be ashamed to award the place to Def."

These two cases reveal some obscurities in the court decisions. Both deal with widows on loaned or pledged land. As remarked before, the Court could grant a title on this kind of land when the loaner had developed the land by planting trees. Anna, the first woman, in the position of a loaner's wife, lost her plot to the other party because he had "developed" the land (i.e. planted some trees on it). On the other hand Monica, the second woman, accused of having pledged the land, was only able to stay on the land because it was proved that her husband had bought it. Given the judges' emphasis on the nature of the transaction - sale or pledge - one might speculate that her case would have been weaker in the case of a pledge. It would have been interesting to see whether her having planted trees and a raffia bush would have affected the judges' decision.

Conflicts about transactions

In the seventies women were very active in land transactions, such as selling or pledging. An example of a woman who succeeded in gaining a land title on the basis of such a transaction will be given in the following case.

case 3: The man who sold his land twice

In this case a woman, Ade N., summoned one man, Ngum M., to appear before the Court, accusing him of trespassing and claiming a title. Her story was as follows:

"I am 32 years old and stay at Mankon. Defendant built his house and then his toilet also on my land. I bought this land from one Papa Abmab, late since 1968. The dimensions were 60x100 ft. There was no agreement in those early days but ambam took me to the chief for
introduction as is the custom... I have an approved plan over the place since 1971. After the acquisition of the land I left out with my husband and have just returned. I was very shocked when I returned of recent to meet a house and latrine on the land."

She reported the case to the caretaker of the late Ambam, and later to Simon Ambam, the son. Both men had warned M. about trespassing but he never listened. To court questions as to which developments she had made on the land, she mentioned building her house in 1969.

Simon Ambam, as one of her witnesses stated:

"I know that Plaintiff acquired a plot from my father but I did not know the dimensions....I have no comments about the trespass because Plaintiff has not shown me the place."

The Defendant M. told the Court:

"The land in dispute belongs to me. I acquired it from late Ambam in 1968. I have not cheated Plaintiff and it may be the landlord Ambam who has cheated her...The dimensions were 80x50 ft. I was shown Plaintiff's house on her plot and a mango tree as a land mark."

To court questions as to whom he had asked permission to build the house and latrine, he indicated Simon Ambam. The court asked:

"If the present place of the latrine was formally within your land why did you then seek approval from the landlord's son?" He answered: "It's because I recognize him now as the landlord. Everything I do within my compound I always alert him."

After inspection the court found that the dimensions accorded with Ade's statement. Moreover, they noticed on the other side of her terrain, trespassing by 10 ft, a foundation and a row of trees, all being the work of Simon. The judges concluded that he was responsible for the quarrel between the two neighbours "for love of money", and granted the land to the woman, ordering M. to remove his kitchen and latrine.

A very common conflict in which women are increasingly involved concerns loaned land which has been planted with permanent crops by the beggar. As mentioned in section 4.2.3., long-term and direct contact between beggar and land could lead to the conversion of property rights to the products into property claims to the land. In former days people would try to avoid this situation, because it was feared, not without reason, that the land would become the loaner's property after some years as was often confirmed by the Customary Court. If the beggar had improved the land by cultivating export crops he has as much right to the land as the owner. If the land was only planted with food crops, however, the owner was entitled to reclaim his land after the harvest. This shift in property rights is a serious threat to women as the first and most important food producers. This is a remarkable example of legal pluralistic jurisprudence within the Customary Court, as a result of the intermingling of customary and state law and socio-economic change.
4.5.2.3. Preliminary conclusion from court records

Some conclusions can be drawn from this short survey of women's conflicts about land in the sixties and seventies. Firstly, despite the small absolute numbers\textsuperscript{18} one can notice a distinct increase in the active share of women in land transactions during the seventies. Inheritance issues also show an increasingly active role of women. An explanation for this increase might be that women have become more aware of their rights thanks to better education. It might also be that their rights were more clearly determined in the second period of research, thanks to the elaborated family legislation of the sixties and the new land legislation of 1974.

The great majority of the cases dealt with the application for title (private ownership) in combination with acts of trespass or damage to crops; boundary conflicts were also frequently brought under the claim of title. This is interesting because it happened in the Anglophone part of Cameroon, where individual title was not yet legally recognized before 1974. It is even more significant when viewed against the background of local customary law, which did not allow women to have a land title, so that a woman's claim, like claiming a title from a female defendant, did not seem to have any legal value. In a small number of the investigated cases women were claiming a title to land, but more often it was the plaintiff who claimed title from a female defendant, apparently because she farmed the plot under dispute. Besides, claiming a "title" appeared to have an inconsistent meaning, with women sometimes being granted a title and at other times not. Still, there were three cases in which a woman received a title in her own name.

From interviews with the female Chief of Service at the Ministry of Justice in Bamenda it also appeared that women have come to know their rights even better during the past few years, although educated urban women were more likely to appeal to this official for legal advice than rural illiterate women. A lot of women know that a family council does not always offer the most effective answer in conflicts about land, and that it is better for them

\textsuperscript{18} Regarding the small number of court cases instigated by women it must be borne in mind that as soon as a case came before the courts, further development of the land in dispute was prohibited (Goheen, 1988). Considering the fact that court cases could drag on for months or even years, women who have only one plot about which a conflict arises might be more reluctant to take the matter to court than people who have access to more than one plot.
to go to the Customary Courts (nowadays the national law-courts) instead.\textsuperscript{19}

As far as the jurisdiction of the Customary Court is concerned it is striking that the judges appeared to have adjusted customary law to the many land transactions and individualization of land rights, just as Rowling observed with respect to the Victoria judges in 1948. They legitimize the production of cash crops at the expense of the food production. As far as loaning or pledging by women is concerned, these are seen as temporary transactions, to which women cannot claim any right. "Native law and custom" is interpreted in very different ways, and is manipulated by judges, parties and witnesses alike, depending on the interests of the strongest and most influential party - usually the male cash crop producer. In the absence of a clear, unequivocal land legislation which protects women and food cultivators, gender-biased court decisions contribute to the further marginalization of women. One could call their attitude towards women ambivalent: women were excluded as a party because of their gender, although they were given some more freedom of action in the seventies. Especially married women, however, had far more difficulty in claiming a title of ownership: in the first instance judges simply did not believe them.

4.6. Land registration

Since the legislation of 1974 it is possible to acquire private landownership by applying for a land certificate. In this section I will deal with the application procedure and the problems and judgements of the institution involved, the Land Consultative Board.\textsuperscript{20}

4.6.1. Land Consultative Boards

Every application for a land certificate is dealt with by the Land

\textsuperscript{19} Another striking fact is that women more often brought witnesses with them who could be regarded as experts, e.g. the Fon or a quarter head. Undoubtedly, this has to do with the increased knowledge of women and probably also with the growing acceptance of women as parties in court.

\textsuperscript{20} For this and the previous section I owe much to discussions with and data from Cyprian Fisiy, whose research findings have been published recently in his PhD thesis (1992). Also the Chief of the Provincial Lands Service at Bamenda gave me much information on the procedural functioning of the L.C.B.
Consultative Boards. These Boards are councils of seven persons in which the District Officer (sous-prefect) is the chairman and the Chief of the Provincial Land Service is the secretary. Officials of the Surveys Service and Town Planning, together with the Fon and two notables of the community involved make up the rest of the council.

The application must be accompanied by statements that the land was either obtained through a Certificate of Occupancy or had been cultivated and administered by the applicant before 1974. After receiving the application form and all the other required documents the Board inspects, surveys, demarcates, and assesses the improvements made on the land involved. In the presence of local witnesses, in particular the village head and elders, the Board has to satisfy itself of the effective use and ownership of the applicant. After the application has been deposited with the Board, people are entitled to object to the registration or lodge counter-claims within thirty days. Objections may refer to whether or not the improvements and developments were made by the applicant, or to the purpose of the developments.

This procedure may look simpler than it actually is, since it often takes a long time before everything is settled. Fisiy's research shows that in 1986 only half of the applications were in fact dealt with by the Board. Of these, only 6.12 (or 55 applicants) were the lucky owners of a land certificate after seven years. The rest was still under consideration and would have to activate the Board one way or another (Fisiy, 1986).

The Land Consultative Boards do not take independent decisions but make recommendations to the Minister of Land about the application of title, which are usually accepted. Furthermore, they have been granted jurisdiction concerning land conflicts in so far as these are attended by claims of ownership (Decree no. 76-15), and concerning any counter-claim or conflict about the ownership of unregistered land which is taken to court by individuals or communities (Law nr. 83-19). According to Nforti (1984) the Boards can only exercise jurisdiction in conflicts about unregistered land when a party takes the matter to court. The law is unclear, however, as to whether the Customary Court is also included in this provision. In any case, the courts of law have kept jurisdiction over all conflicts concerning

21 "All other landed property cases shall fall within the jurisdiction of the courts [modern or customary?] excepting cases relating to inter-communal boundary dispute." (Law nr. 83-19)
state domains, and over land certificates which have already been granted by the Board and contested (e.g. in the case of trespassing, damage, or fraudulent legal proceedings in order to obtain a certificate). The High Court deals with claims above 500,000 Fcfa, for claims under this sum one has to go to the Magistrate’s Court.22

Not a single law states explicitly whether appeal can be lodged against the recommendations of the Board and if so, at which institution. Before 1983 the Administrative Court acted as the Court of Appeal against ministerial decisions. According to the Provincial Chief of Lands in Bamenda one can only appeal against a ministerial decision (based on advise by the Boards) at the Administrative Bench, that is the President of Cameroon. The Minister of Lands (chairman) and a number of high judges hold seats on this Bench. In practice, it seldom occurs that an individual or community takes this step because of its inhibiting powers. It is not possible either to lodge a protest against the recommendations of the Board before they reach the Minister, because these recommendations are not taken to the parties involved or otherwise made public. Owing to this unclear and formal procedure considerable decisive powers are in practice attached to the Land Consultative Board, which is not in accordance with its advisory status.

Let me illustrate the rules of the Land Consultative Board with some typical examples. I was not allowed access to the records of the Board, but instead I presented the official concerned a number of fictitious cases to which he indicated the most common arbitration decisions.

* Individual conflicts about land in which no one applies for a certificate, e.g. boundary conflicts:
  - These conflicts are not dealt with, neither by the Board, nor by the Customary Court. Thus, in order to be considered, an application of registration is always required.
* A conflict about family land among relatives:

22 Although the Customary Court did not handle these disputes any longer, the plaintiffs had the possibility to institute a criminal case against trespassing or illegal occupation, albeit indirectly: through “disturbance of quiet enjoyment of land”. In this provision the ownership of the land did not have to be proved by certificates, but only the cultivation and use of it. The provision was very well suited to land conflicts in the many cases in which no one had applied for a certificate (information from a Magistrate in Bamenda).
- The family head is allowed to apply for a certificate in more than one name so that the land remains within the family (which is rarely done, by the way). Unfortunately I have no further information on this.

* An individual begged land twenty years ago, on which he has since built a house and cultivated coffee. The children of the real owner claim the land:
- The conflict can only be taken to the Board when the beggar of the land applies for a certificate. As rule, he will be granted ownership because he (usually a male) has contributed to the development and well-being of the family or community. The real owners do not have the right to reclaim the land.

* A similar situation in which a person has for twenty years been cultivating food crops on a piece of land, without planting permanent crops or building a house:
- He or she (usually a female) would lose the land to the plaintiffs because the land has not been developed.

* In the case of boundary-crossing of land on which permanent crops are cultivated:
- The Board will divide the trespassed land between both parties.

4.6.2. Quantitative data on private ownership

As a result of the slow and painful procedure, many people do not apply for a certificate if this is not strictly necessary, especially in rural areas. Even in urban areas people will only take this step when a certificate is needed, e.g. as a preparation for other procedures, such as approval of a construction plan and applying for a bank loan for which a pledge is required. People also follow this procedure if they have a land conflict and want the Board's arbitration (Fisly, 1986). Land owners are often not able to develop their land for years because various people have lodged counter-claims (which means either that the land was sold fraudulently or that the claims are false). Before these conflicts are solved, many years will pass in which the land cannot be cultivated.

Various estimates are available of the number of issued land certificates and the share of women in this. Calculations made by the Provincial Chief of Lands amount to 760 applications by women in the Mezam Division (according to him 5% of the total number of applications). My informants confirmed that more
than 500 women in Bamenda own land. These are mainly women who have inherited land from their parents in the absence of brothers or through a legacy. There are not many women who have bought land independently, according to the said Provincial Chief.\textsuperscript{23} These figures differ greatly from the number of issued certificates to women. Fisly (1992: 96) recorded no more than 39 certificates issued to women in the Mezam Division, mainly in the urban area of Bamenda.\textsuperscript{24} Probably these differences indicate that there is a large group of women who have bought land or acquired it otherwise, without having legal documents to prove it. This makes their legal position rather weak in procedures such as expropriation, counter-claims or sale of the land.

The land titles in rural areas are mainly in the hands of the educated elite (civil servants, officials, administrators, tradesmen, of which a few title-holders are female (Fisly, 1986/1992). This new rural elite appears to seize the opportunity to register family land in their own name. Goheen (1989) refers to the “Big Men” who have a good education and good jobs. Because of their respect and status they are able to mislead the local dignitaries (who often have less legal knowledge) to permit them to register community land in their own name. In 1980 approximately a hundred men in the region of Nso had registered a total of 50 ha in this way. After registration they can speculate with the land, sell it to others and keep the earnings, or set up a large-scale coffee plantation, without their relatives being able to prohibit it.

4.7. Summary and conclusion

As has been explained in this chapter, pre-colonial land tenure in the Grassfields was aimed at preserving village land for the village, and family land for the family. Individual rights to land were derived from these principles. Women’s access to land was secured through their relationships

\textsuperscript{23} It must be noted that this only refers to women who have registered land in their own name. We are not able to verify how many women have land in their husband’s name, as was common practice in the past. From my research in Old Town it appears that 8 women (16%) bought land in their own name, of whom only two had no land certificate.

\textsuperscript{24} Fisly has examined the socio-economic background of various social groups who applied for a land certificate. As regards women I will mention here that most of these certificates are held by businesswomen, civil servants and housewives (Fisly, 1992).
with their family and in-laws, and could be suppleted or improved by transactions (loan, pledge, later on sale) or by clearing a plot themselves. A change in marital status often challenged their access to family land. In recent years women's control of land has been undermined by economical and politic-juridical processes, of which some have been discussed in this chapter.

Land policy in West-Cameroon, from the days of the German colonists onward, had to unite various interests: those of the customary leaders, those of the indigenous population groups and those of the European entrepeneurs and plantation owners. Transactions in land were formally prohibited but in practice they were not in the least hindered by legislation. Purchase of land went on steadily, accompanied by phenomena such as double sales, dispossession of land on which strangers had been living for years, land shortage, and numerous conflicts. Particularly in the rapidly growing towns such as Bamenda these land conflicts flared up powerfully in the sixties, and assumed extraordinarily complicated forms.

In 1974 a new period dawned, in which private landownership was legalized, to develop the economic potential of the state and to improve the position of middle-scale rural planters and farmers. As a result of this legislation individuals, communities (and the few holders of Certificates of Occupancy) can apply for a certificate of ownership of customarily tended land. This registration of ownership creates its own problems, as we have seen.

From research in the records of the Mankon Customary Court it appeared that women are increasingly involved in land conflicts, sometimes as plaintiffs but more often as defendants. Especially widows become more and more subject to attacks by for example in-laws trying to drive them off their deceased husband's lands. Women were also increasingly involved in land transactions and in the defence of their rights to family land. The judges' attitude towards women is marked by ambivalence. Women have to make far more effort to have their claims honoured, but especially since the seventies, they are more accepted as a party. Property claims by permanent cultivation and permanent alienation of land are recognized in the judgements of the Court, which means a shift in the direction of individual rights to land, to the detriment of family interests and women's use rights.

From the above it may be concluded that customary claims on land, which offered married women a reasonable social security but which could be
disadvantageous to unmarried and divorced women and widows, have come under more pressure in recent years. A growing elite abuses the 1974 legislation by claiming large plots of family land for their own purposes, at the expense of the self-subsistence agriculture by women. They do not seem to feel restricted by their customary rights and duties towards women. In this shift of interests women, who have less chance of acquiring individual ownership, tend to lose out. Because women have no firm rights of ownership to family land they cannot convert these rights into land certificates.

Women's use and management rights to family land are also increasingly restricted to short-term use rights for the cultivation of food. Their rights to loan land and to beg from others fade, and fallow land is more often reclaimed by the owner. Sometimes owners even ask rent from members of their family for the use of land (Goheen, 1989).

Conversely, women have found alternative ways to acquire land such as buying, but not many women can do this. Less than 5% of the women applied for land certificates, which is obviously still a very small proportion, although it is of major importance as the start of a trend. As we have seen above, men and women did not have equal chance of acquiring land before 1974 (although the law started from that assumption - every individual who owns land can apply for a certificate). It is still the case that the male community elders own and control the ancestral lands. Women only have use and management rights which they cannot convert into rights of ownership without reason. Only for land which they have acquired through their own efforts can they apply for a certificate. That is why customary law still gives men a considerable priority over women. In any case, the new legislation has achieved that private landownership by women, registered in their own name is beginning to be accepted. For this small group of women who can afford to buy land with their own means, the law is working well. The result is an increasing differentiation between the various groups of women.

Fisiy (1986) already warned against this effect of the land law reform, namely the emergence of a class of landowners versus one of the landless. In the concluding chapter I will elaborate on the processes of stratification which have commenced between the various groups of women.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Having viewed the situation of urban women from different angles and perspectives I would like to draw some conclusions, especially regarding the question whether women's diminished access to land leads to marginalization and stratification and if so, which part is played by the various levels of land tenure and the state.

5.1. Access to land

In this study I hope to have demonstrated that land still is an important economic source for urban women in Cameroon and a major tool in their survival strategies.

Generally, access to land is necessary in the interaction between the various systems of production; both for a continuation of the subsistence economy and as an additional source of income to labourers in the formal sector (at the same time their wages can be maintained at a low level). Land is also a direct factor in the production of cash crops yielding a cash income. In the informal sector access to land is of major importance, too, not only as a supplement to commercial activities (sale of surplus food production and other income-generating activities), but also as a pledge for credit loans. 70-80% of all urban women cultivate food, often in addition to other income-generating activities such as trade, services, employment, letting of rooms, or combinations of these. For most of these strategies access to land is necessary; an indication of the importance women attach to land is that many of them travel for hours and many miles to reach their plots. Their need for land, however, faces strong competition from the needs of coffee planters, rural farmers, cattle-owners and those elite groups who purchase land on a large scale.

The ways in which women acquire land vary greatly but can basically be broken down into family relations and transactions. A minority of the women interviewed (40%) still have access to land through family bonds, mainly with their own family. For the majority of the women, however, land transactions such as purchase, leasing, and begging are the only means to acquire land. Customary access to land for urban women has become very restricted, when compared to the pre-colonial period, whereas their demand for land is still evident. Especially land-loan relationships and, to a lesser extent, family relationships are under great pressure due to the increasing shortage of land. This shortage has been caused by commercial agriculture and
individualized landownership. For fear of gradual appropriation of their plots, owners usually grant a loan only for a short period, and restrict its use to seasonal crops. As a result, women frequently have to beg land from other owners, often in return for part of the crop. This practice is always short-termed and deals with far-off plots, which can be interpreted as a sign of land shortage. Especially widows and unmarried women have to turn to these loan relations since their family networks are limited.

Women's management and usage rights are also increasingly restricted, as family heads tend to take back land after the period of fallow, or reserve it for commercial farming. This makes it more difficult for women to beg land and to loan it to other people, especially if they are not related. Family heads consequently play a greater part in the allocation of land and in the kinship organisation, at the expense of women's autonomy.

In the last decades we have seen a shift from family-based to individual-based interests and property. The current Customary Courts seem to follow this shift towards individual property and no longer acknowledge the primary interest of familial and communal rights. This is an advantage for those women who are able to acquire land on their own, and for those who have lost contact with their family land. Moreover, women have gained more possibilities to acquire land individually by purchase. However, these possibilities are beyond the reach of poor women, as their income is too low and their credit-worthiness non-existent. Women who can only derive their use rights to land from their relationships with the family or community find themselves a very insecure position.

Even the new legislation which offers individuals a possibility to register land in their own name is not an adequate solution for women, because they cannot assert absolute landownership in customary law. Moreover, since well-informed male members of the family (can) do this, women are deprived of their possibilities to utilize and possess land. This is, as we have seen, an important factor in the marginalization process.

The housing problems of a growing number of landless migrants are closely related to this decreasing access to land in the town. They lack a customary right to urban land (because they are strangers) and lack money to buy a plot. As far as housing is concerned they can rent a room or try to squat on a piece of waste land in town. The new land legislation is threatening these less educated and poor city-dwellers, too, because they are often not able to apply for a certificate of ownership of the land they live on. They do not
receive any sort of compensation should they be expropriated due to local planning activities (Nsutebu, unpubl.).

5.2. The State and land politics

In the subsistence economy, access to land by women was linked to their contacts with men, especially through marriage. Indeed, most of the women were married and thus assured of land. Still, there were women who fell beyond the desired standards (as widows refusing to remarry, or as divorced women) and because of that, had difficulty in acquiring land, but this was a rather small group.

As a result of the changes in the colonial and post-colonial period the number of women who stayed unmarried increased considerably; because of their unmarried status and other factors such as migration, commercialization, and urbanization they no longer had any land at their disposal. They concentrated on commerce, provision of services and, if necessary and available, wage labour. In contrast, we see a tendency towards constitution of the nuclear family and "enlarged" families with looser connections within the extended family. Due to this, the connection with family land may also get lost.

The new land legislation of 1974 took advantage of these new trends towards individualization and looser family connections, and made private ownership of land possible. In theory the new legislation ought to properly connect with the new life-style in the cities and ought to enable women to acquire land individually. However, this legislation does not consider existing and newly rising inequalities in power of control, so that only a small group of women (with the best access to education, capital, and political decision-making) are able to profit from it. The majority of women, however, are in grave danger of losing their present access to land without it being replaced by an alternative.

The role of the state has become more and more explicit in this process, the more so since land shortage and the need for investments in land are increasing. Cameroonian state politics aim to reach national self-sufficiency through integrated rural development and agricultural modernization by "exploitations agricoles de moyenne importance" (EAMI), middle-scale farming.

The 1974 Land Ordinances are important tools to this end, assuming that farmers will develop and invest more in their private land than in land owned by the community or family (Sixth Five-year Planning 1986-1991).

On the one hand, the customary structures are being torn down by these
policies, which makes pretexts for individual agricultural development and land exploitation visible. On the other, these structures are still an important means to acquire private land, as is shown by the recent ventures of the new elite (Goheen 1989). The interaction between national legislation and the dynamics of local land tenure allows scope for various strategies. Women as well as men try to acquire land in different ways, by seeking alliances with the bureaucracy, by manipulating local kinship relations, or by taking the law into their own hands and resorting to squatting. In general, the urban educated elite appears to take most advantage of the new legal state of affairs. Land in the Grassfields is slowly being concentrated into the hands of a small group of rich individuals (primarily men) thereby widening the gap between rich and poor (most of the latter are women). A small elite group of "Big Women" is successful, too, in acquiring land and land certificates in their own name and with their own money.

5.2.3. Stratification and marginalization

In this section I will return to the definition of marginalization as formulated in the first chapter. We have seen that the loss of means of subsistence without tapping new alternative sources can lead to marginalization. Ultimately, this depends on the social safety-net and the responsibility for others. As far as the latter is concerned, the situation is more or less similar for all investigated women, because they all have to take care of children or relatives. However, their situations differ in the extent to which they have to bear responsibility alone or can share it with others. If we restrict the "social safety-net" to financial help by others, we can indicate the means of existence and chances of marginalization among various groups of women (in accordance with their family situation). It may be assumed that women who are head of a household bear more responsibilities than women who live with a man (whether or not married). It is true that in the latter case incomes and patterns of budgeting are often separate as well, but still the woman can appeal to the partner's co-responsibility for large and unexpected expenses. Men's financial contribution appears to vary enormously, for that matter. At all events, having control of stable economic sources seems be far more necessary for single women than for married women, because the former cannot expect contributions of others (although this does happen in practice).

In principle, urban women have more economic sources than land, such as commerce and employment in the formal and informal sector, but these are not
accessible to all women. Indeed, some well-to-do and educated women have individually set up a thriving business or have individually acquired land. Factors such as lack of education, employment, and credit, and heavy responsibilities at home, however, cause certain groups of women (in particular single, uneducated women with children) to work only in the lower echelons of the informal sector. One such source of income, in which a woman invests all her energy and time, can be sufficient, but more often they will try to diversify their sources of income. The most successful survival strategies of people in the Third World are based on spreading risks: the tapping of several sources simultaneously (Janssen, 1987). The fact that more and more people are taking up the retail trade is caused by a lack of adequate economic resources (such as land). In the present economic crisis one may ask, however, if this survival strategy stands a good chance of success, because the more people are involved in the retail trade the less chance there is of obtaining a sufficient income. Ever since Cameroon landed in a severe economic crisis a few years ago, the contrasts between the various social groups have become more painful, and the competition on the labour market ruinous. In the struggle between the sexes ever more economic activities of women tend to be taken over by men. Thus, an increasing number of men can be found in the retail trade or even in the food trade as buyam-sellams, although this was originally a typically female sector. Another new phenomenon is the coffee-farmers' tendency to replace their plantations by food crops, as the coffee-prices have dropped considerably and the plants yield a profit only after some years. Cultivating food crops pays off immediately and is a lucrative business in times of crisis. The effects can be disastrous for women since male farmers usually produce on a large scale and can be fearsome competition for women's smaller businesses. Men often have more access to capital, land, knowledge, and credit, so that they are in a much more favourable position in this competitive struggle, and can simply oust female traders. Conversely, it is far more difficult for women to find alternative employment in this economic crisis, which further exacerbates the marginalization process of poor women.

In conclusion I would like to argue that a severe stratification process has started between various groups of urban women, not only regarding landownership, training, and education but also regarding the family situation and the bearing of responsibilities. Particularly the position of widows is very vulnerable since they find themselves in the awkward position that, as soon as the husband dies, they may even loose their rights to the
house, land, and goods.
As far as the single, uneducated mother engaged in the informal sector is concerned, it becomes clear from my study that access to land or not is a crucial, but certainly not the only factor in her survival strategies. In any case growing food (as an additional or only source of income) gives women more financial freedom, which enables them to invest more in commercial activities and to improve their existence. Women who have only one economic source and no access to land, lack a stable financial basis and have to exert themselves more to survive. This also depends on other factors such as financial support from others, the nature of their alternative activities, their personality, and their networks, to what extent they succeed in acquiring economic autonomy.

One must not exclude the possibility, though, that the importance of access to land will eventually decrease (although, not disappear altogether) as an economic source for urban women in favour of education, commerce, and employment in Bamenda. Cameroon is in the middle of a transition period in which the emphasis is shifting from self-subsistence agriculture to wage labour and commercial production. Both massive land transactions and food production is being increasingly commercialized. The data on Douala and Yaounde confirm this tendency, although even there a majority of the population try to grow part of their food themselves, because they have no other options.
Furthermore I expect that the importance of land as accommodation will become much greater as scarcity of land increases in the towns, and urban quarters with squatted land and houses will grow. The experience of Douala and Yaounde shows that the government tends to react to this by means of evictions. Land policies are not equipped for these situations and only deal with formal town planning on behalf of officially registered residents.

5.4. Final remarks on social and land policy
As regards governmental measures to prevent the marginalization of women, the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs nowadays tries to stimulate women to work on a larger scale, by establishing women's cooperatives and organizing training and management courses. When setting up groups and projects the Ministry demands that women register their land formally, to prevent the previous owner from reclaiming it after it has been developed (information from the Director of Women's Affairs of the said Ministry). The Business
Women's Associations which operate regionally and nation-wide also follow the same policy. However, these associations only reach the better equipped business women and have no contact with the poorer women in the slum quarters.

The World Bank has recently developed a Social Adjustment Programme in Cameroon to protect the most vulnerable social groups against the effects of the economic crisis. This programme consists of loans and donations to projects aimed at income-generating and training. In Bamenda these projects involve knitting, catering, and commercial activities of women's groups. The most vulnerable groups of women, however, cannot be reached because they are not organised and (according to the Provincial Delegate of the Ministry of Social and Women's Affairs) do not have sufficient perspective to acquire economic autonomy. These poorest women might be reached through various church organisations and be involved in development projects.

The solution to the housing problems of the poorest squatters should, rather, be sought in stimulating measures by the government and infrastructure facilities, for example through the "site-and-services-schemes" with guaranteed housing rights for women, in which the government supplies the water supply, sewage, and electricity while the residents build their own houses to keep the costs as low as possible. Furthermore, land will have to be reserved and possibly leased out in the town or suburbs to cultivate food. These proposals will have to be looked into more closely in order to establish their practical feasibility.

Finally, to return to the access to land of the poorest women: it is clear that the 1974 land legislation is not an adequate solution. Indeed it has in many cases meant a change for the worse. The introduction of private ownership is in fact one of the main causes of the present social strain. Stratification is growing between groups who have various economic sources at their disposal (labour, large plots of profitable land, and capital) and groups whose access to sources is dwindling and who are therefore in danger of marginalization. Among the latter single, uneducated mothers and widows are an especially vulnerable group. Reason enough to recommend further research into appropriate social and legal channels by means of which land security for women can be achieved. As regards legal measures, one may consider the use of direct state intervention, in the form of a differentiated legislation which reconfirms and strengthens women's customary rights to land. Similar ideas have been proposed by Newman (1981), Jones
(1981), and Davison (1988) among others. However, these measures have to go hand in hand with fundamental social and cultural changes; if not, they will remain dead-letter laws.
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The department of Political and Historical Studies concentrates on pure scientific research. The main emphasis is on the ideological and economic aspects of the State in Africa. Research takes place within the framework of the Cameroon programme, and in conjunction with the socio-economic department of the Centre. Important subjects are wage labour in the rural areas, land law problems, in particular in the neighbourhood of the larger cities, ethnic articulation and regional incorporation; comparative study of effects on rural development of French and British colonial administration. The department also has a programme focusing on Southern Africa. Here the main objective is to analyse developments in political economy and culture and the effects of these on neighbouring areas. A part of the research in this department falls outside the scope of these regional programmes, viz., the research into peasant movements in general and legal pluralism in Africa.

In addition to the research departments, the Institute has a library and a documentation section. The library holds the only specialized collection of books on Africa in the Netherlands. There is also a film library. The films are available on loan for educational purposes. A catalogue with descriptions of the films and a list of titles of films of other collections in the Netherlands in Dutch is available from the secretariat.

The Centre is responsible for a monograph series which is published by Kegan Paul Int., London. Other research reports and working papers are published by the Institute itself. Periodic publications include an Abstracts Journal with summaries of articles from recently published journals and collections; a list of the latest library acquisitions; and a Newsletter on African Studies in the Netherlands containing an annual survey of research concerning Africa in the Netherlands, which is published in cooperation with the African Studies Association.

The African Studies Association cooperates closely with the African Studies Centre in promoting research and education relevant to African studies in the Netherlands. The Association advises the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO) on applications for research funding in the social sciences and the humanities concerning Africa. The secretariat is based in the Institute's offices.

The library is open to the public on weekdays between 9.00-13.00 and 14.00-17.00, tel. 071-273354.

A list of publications, annual reports and research programmes of the respective research departments as well as surveys of current research are available free of charge from the secretariat, tel. 071-273372.

Information on the loan of films is obtainable from the secretariat.