

DE-AGRARIANISATION AND RURAL EMPLOYMENT NETWORK

Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden
October 1997

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE: ELITE WOMEN'S STRATEGIES IN BRAZZAVILLE

Patricia Paravano

ASC Working Paper 23 / 1997

Copies may be ordered from:
Afrika-Studiecentrum
P.O. Box 9555
2300 RB Leiden
The Netherlands
Fax 31-71-527-3344
E-mail: asc@fsw.leidenuniv.nl



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction	1
Brazzaville: The Other Capital of France	3
Elite Formation Through Urbanisation and Education	4
The Female Wage and Expenditure	6
Significance of Women's Strategies	7
The In-law Factor	8
Female Strategies Towards a Brighter Future	10
An Internationalised Elite Household	11
The <i>Deuxième Bureau</i> Household	13
New Socialisation and Filiation	14
Conclusions	16
References	18
ASC Working Papers	20

WORKING FOR THE FUTURE: ELITE WOMEN'S STRATEGIES IN BRAZZAVILLE

Patricia Paravano*

Abstract

This paper examines the strategies applied by elite women in Brazzaville, Congo to achieve lifelong financial security and independence for themselves and their children. Analysis of the active female construction of a new habitus to promote the women's socio-economic status has revealed and redefined the elite group's stratification. Women's positions in the household and their way of identifying themselves socially form part of these strategies. Their empowerment has led to specific changes such as the emergence of the 'deuxième bureau' among the well-educated. New lifestyle patterns emphasise the privatisation of the family and promote considerable changes in gender relations. Relationships between elite women and the extended family are also discussed.

Introduction

For some years now international institutions such the World Bank and the IMF have exerted pressure on Congo to reduce the size of its government bureaucracy.¹ In so doing they affect the elite's way of life, weakening its social position and sense of security. The formation of an elite in Brazzaville, known as *les Cadres*, is recent. The specific organisation of their household units,² as observed during a year's fieldwork in 1989-90, is the subject of this paper. Qualitative forms of data collection were used, notably interviews and direct observation due to the very personal and sometimes secret side of household affairs.

The 1980s was a period of profound change in male and female roles. In rural and urban areas men are primarily responsible for the household's financial welfare, but in towns, particularly Brazzaville, women's access to tertiary activities may provide

* I would like to thank Deborah Bryceson for reading and discussing this paper at length and Ann Reeves for correcting my English. I am very grateful to Antoinette and the other women I worked with in Brazzaville for their help and I dedicate this paper to all Congolese women.

¹ According to *Marchés Tropicaux* (June 1991 n. 2379), the government of the transition should: '(...)réduire les dépenses de fonctionnement de l'Etat qui absorbent plus de 50% du budget. La principale difficulté résidera dans la réduction des effectifs de la fonction publique qui compte 80000 agents.'

² Contrary to the usual definition of a household as those consuming from the same cooking pot, my definition relates to another 'basic need', that of sleeping. The household is defined here as the people regularly sleeping in the same residence.

them an income and an extended set of social relations that influence their involvement in the domestic sphere. A separate income gives women the opportunity to organise personal projects and influence power relations within and beyond the household.

The Brazzavillian 'elite' is defined as those enjoying a material lifestyle that is superior to that of the vast majority of the population. Because reliable statistics in the form of household budget surveys are not available, it is difficult to state precisely what percentage of the population falls into this category. On the other hand, any resident of Brazzaville has a very clear notion of who does and does not belong in the categorisation. Ownership of cars and well-built, attractive houses with western conveniences and appliances provide the clearest line of demarcation.

While consumption is the demarcator of elite status shared by all its members, the ways and means by which women achieve an elite status are differentiated into two main paths, which in turn relate to differing goals and investment patterns. These distinctions are pronounced and thus necessitate the sub-division of elite women into two groups: the internationalised elite and the *petites fonctionnaires* (Paravano 1990). The first group has developed a French middle-class lifestyle, and has used education to climb the social ladder. The *petites fonctionnaires*³ are less educated and more oriented to local scales of achievement. Women in this group rely heavily on their physical looks, fashionable dress and personal charm to improve their material position and gain social security. In both cases women are developing a certain lifestyle related to a conception of the ideal man.

The women in this study are between 30-40 years old and are all civil servants in Brazzavillian government departments.⁴ As wage earners they have prestige and exert influence on the rest of the urban population. This paper describes the urban context of Brazzaville, the implications of urbanisation on the elite woman's way of life, and the transformation of elite women's social attitudes through their economic strategies. The social obstacles elite women encounter are also discussed. Household case study evidence is provided to demonstrate that elite women's actions have engendered an arena of conflict involving the household and its wider kinship network. Before concluding, the paper examines new forms of socialisation and filiation arising from elite women's strategies.

³This French expression is kept for its subjectivity which evokes female civil servants at the very first degree of hierarchy, mostly working at windows providing information and public services and who are very distinctive by their expensive clothing. In the administrative part of town it was easy to distinguish them from other women.

⁴ For example post and telecommunications, water and electricity companies, education and health.

Brazzaville: The Other Capital of France

The last 20 years have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of women entering the formal labour force. A related phenomenon has been the movement of women abroad to study or join their husbands who are taking courses or working in foreign countries, notably France.⁵ In this respect Congolese women are part of an openness which characterised pre-colonial Congo. French colonisation restricted this openness causing Congo to concentrate its outside dealings only with France, leading to the creation of strong Franco-Congolese identities.

The relationship between the two nations was cemented in two phases: first, the implementation of a French administration⁶ and secondly, Congo's support for the French nation during World War II. Amongst the elite, memories of this partnership dominate, while the experience of domination has faded. At a political level the existence of Congo was deeply influenced by military and political decisions taken to liberate France from the Germans. While the French government of Vichy fully collaborated with the Germans, the head of the French resistance, General de Gaulle, turned to Brazzaville using it as the capital of '*la France libre*' and as the basis for a new offensive (Auger 1981:208, Menga 1993:14). This diplomatic, but also greatly symbolic, collaboration between the two countries changed the appreciation the French authorities had for their colonies and Congo in particular.

G. Balandier refers in his book *Les Brazzavilles Noires* to a N'Gol (De Gaulle) cult in the 1940s which indicates a positive reference to the relationship between the two nations. The statue of General de Gaulle was still standing in 1990 and commemoration ceremonies are held each year (the most recent being in July 1996 during President Chirac's official visit to Congo). World War II resistance against the 'enemy' emerges as a collaboration with France as an ally and thus a relationship of equality. This situation contributed, especially among educated people, to a feeling of proximity with the French, instead of a feeling of inferiority and alienation as Fanon (1952) describes it.

Congo was granted its independence on August 15 1960 at virtually the same time as Gabon, the Central African Republic and Chad. Special attention given by the French to the modernisation of the still young city of Brazzaville was intended to make it attractive to European entrepreneurs. 'On the eve of independence, therefore, Congo was the best-equipped of the four territories of French Equatorial Africa;⁷ it was also the best educated, most urbanised, and most industrialised of the four' (Auger 1981:211).

⁵The *cadres* travel regularly to western countries. Another kind of flow of Congolese to France can be seen in the example of the Sapeurs (Gandoulou 1984).

⁶In 1884 a French administrator, Savorgnan de Brazza, founded the capital of Congo on the western side of the Stanley Pool river and since the beginning of French colonisation this natural divide has been the national border separating Congo from Zaire (previously called the Belgian Congo).

⁷French Equatorial Africa is a geographical and economic zone including Gabon, Congo, the Central African Republic and Chad.

Paradoxically, after 1960 Brazzaville still needed French financial support to keep the economy balanced because of the acceleration of urbanisation. By the end of the 1960s a new political era had begun. President Fulbert Youlou modelled the administrative system on that in France, but exacerbated a north/south divide in favour of the southern region. This attitude generated opposition and led to his downfall. The 1963 revolution brought a left-oriented ideology and a succession of Marxist-Leninist leaders. Over time this leftist inclination has resulted in the creation of the Union *Révolutionnaire des Femmes Congolaises* (URFC),⁸ an organisation promoting equality between men and women.

From 1968 onwards, the race to run the country has regularly provoked civil wars and riots. In 1979 Denis Sassou N'Guesso became president of Congo and used a Marxist-Leninist ideology as a framework for his administration for eleven years. He had to step down as political leader after the *Conférence Nationale* in 1990. The most recent elections in August 1992 brought Pascal Lissouba to the presidency. The passage of political power from one group to another was violent, and the economic decline which started in the 1980s worsened as a result of the devaluation of the Franc CFA in 1994. It is in this difficult context that the group of women studied have had to find their way in the labour market.

Elite Formation Through Urbanisation and Education

Congo is statistically one of the most urbanised nations in Africa. The approximately two million inhabitants of the country are concentrated in two large cities, Pointe Noire and Brazzaville. Originally European settlements, both cities were established as administrative centres for the colonial regime. The spread of colonial enterprises, notably mines, plantations, and export and building firms in the interior, sparked African migration from rural areas to towns.⁹ The discovery of large oil resources during the 1970s increased the wealth of the urban population and encouraged heavy migration from the villages to the cities. Brazzaville today gives the impression of being a big village compared to its neighbour, Kinshasa.

After World War II, a group of educated people worked as civil servants for the French in Brazzaville and towns in the southern regions. In the 1970s, the children of this generation studied at universities in the capital or abroad: in France, the USSR, East Germany or Cuba. Upon their return, women with foreign higher education joined the new Congolese elite. Education has given them access to civil service employment

⁸URFC is a very powerful organisation and useful to business women.

⁹The first change brought about by the French in Congolese infrastructure was the construction of the railway which links the north-east of the country to Pointe Noire and its harbour on the Atlantic Ocean. This means of transportation allowed commodities such as palm-oil, lead, oil, copper and gold produced in different French colonies to be shipped overseas.

enabling them to create a specific new Brazzavillian way of life based on superior earning power and consumption patterns relative to the rest of the urban female population. The emergence of this generation of women who studied in the 1970s is a noticeable change. They represent the first generation of female civil servants with high-level positions and consumer power, both typically urban phenomena.

Brazzaville has a small modern centre and extensive suburbs. Elite women reside in the centre in old '*logements de fonction*' or new accommodation in southern districts like Bacongo, Makelekele, M'Pila etc. In Moukondo, in the north-west part of the city, extensive modern residences have been bought by the elite. New houses are built far from the centre where land can be purchased cheaply. Transport into the centre of the city and to their workplace is not a problem for the elite because they have cars. Poor women are more confined to the remote residential areas because they cannot afford public transport. They work in fields outside the city or in forbidden areas like the airport, or develop small empty tracts of land close to rivers and railways. From this unpaid work they obtain enough income to feed their family by selling a part of their crop to small markets (the 10F CFA market).¹⁰

In 1990 the economy of Brazzaville was primarily service oriented. While the existence of an elite signifies economic stratification, it is important to stress that the population is not structured into visible classes. Workers' day celebrations on May 1 in Brazzaville consist of marching groups of civil servants rather than a proletariat. Civil servants overwhelmingly dominate employment in the formal sector. The rest of the population are engaged in the informal sector. The informal sector consists of large- and small-scale traders and artisans.

Economic stratification is further blurred by ubiquitous interpersonal relations and clientelism. The internationalised elite women are entangled in these relations, but try to avoid them or at least impose a more westernised form on them. The *petites fonctionnaires* are, on the contrary, masters in using personal connections and family pressure.

Interestingly, the governing elite is more closely aligned to the *petites fonctionnaires* than the internationalised elite. Among the overwhelmingly male government leadership patron-client relations are central. Politicians stay in power on the basis of support from the *ainés sociaux*, exploiting the energies of the *cadets sociaux* who are male and female members of the internationalised elite. The inability of the 'young' cadres to emerge politically encourages them to assert their identity through the cultural sphere. Their political elders ostensibly reject French cultural influences, making a political statement by rejecting western norms which run against the grain of

¹⁰These kinds of markets are found at the periphery of the main markets. They are very rudimentary and women can buy food for 10f CFA before the devaluation of 1994.

Congolese social institutions, especially those related to the extended family. The younger politically neutral local elite, particularly the women are far more flexible. The women may selectively embrace French norms to fashion a specific lifestyle. They are turning their external position in patrilineal and matrilineal family structures to their advantage, while men are more likely to adhere to descent organisation. The advantages of this flexibility work both ways. Because of their willingness to manipulate local patron-client relations, it is *petites fonctionnaires* rather than the internationalised elite women who are closest to the centre of political power and control in Congo.

The Female Wage and Expenditure

For women, a job provides the respectability¹¹ and status that she could only achieve formerly by bearing a child. It also has a great impact inside the household because economic instability has weakened the role of the male breadwinner. Deteriorating conditions in the Congolese economy combined with the elite's efforts to achieve a western standard of living makes the female wage vital to household welfare. The costs of education, clothes, petrol and European-style furniture forces both partners to work. Not infrequently one or both hold down more than one job at a time. The extensive service sector makes it possible for qualified people to acquire several jobs, sometimes in very different fields.

In addition to a salary, an elite woman's work gives her freedom from the domestic realm and the chance to meet other women and socialise. The solidarity of their work-based social life entails additional expenditures on clothes and subscriptions to associations.¹² In town, clan and kinship relations of solidarity and dependency are partly replaced by membership of a wide variety of 'associations'. Besides choosing individual associations, wage earners are members of the *Moziki*¹³ of the company they work for. Women become members of these groups because they value friendship as well as the financial and moral support they offer. In Brazzaville, this support can go as far as intervention on behalf of a woman in a marital dispute. Thus, beyond their restricted family environments, women are joining groups or creating new ones to find the material help and social solidarity they need.

Within the household, the female wage is making its mark and according women

¹¹According to an inquiry by Tonda and Daho in 1988, 48.5 per cent of the married women wage earners, of their sample, were monetarily involved in domestic expenditures to achieve social prestige.

¹²This refers not only to association *d'entraide* but also to membership in religious social organisations.

¹³The aim of the *Moziki* is to pool efforts on any kind of basis (eg. sex, district, profession) in order to make a *tontine*. In Brazzaville the state enterprises have their own *Moziki* structured around a Chef/Cheftaine. One of the main tasks of the *Moziki* is to organise the funeral of an employee. The members collect money for the widow (male or female) and offer beverages, and singers and drums players perform during the *veillées de deuil* with the members to support the family.

more power. A wife is now increasingly asked for monetary contributions to the domestic economy. Some women see these demands as a negative effect of their success while others see it as a way of establishing an equal relationship with their husbands. The different reactions to this new demand depend on the individual situation but also on the couple's relationship, i.e. '*rapport conjugal*'. Where the model of a monogamous couple is the frame of reference, material contributions seem to be normal for the wife. When monogamy is not totally accepted by the husband, the wife refuses to contribute to a joint purse, fearing loss of control over her earnings. The country's economic crisis has worked in one of two ways. Either it increases cooperation between the couple or it can be the basis of greater distrust regarding the monetary contributions of each partner (Vidal 1978, Dinan 1978).

Women are contributing to the maintenance of the house in addition to their own projects (Tonda and Daho 1989). They cover the costs of the childminder or the housekeeper because it is considered their task to take care of the children and to do the housekeeping. They also pay for water. If the husband is contributing for '*la popote*' (food) some women will add extra money to get additional supplies or a more varied menu. Women work for several reasons: to help the husband (which does not always mean giving money for household purposes), to achieve financial independence and self-esteem, and to realise social prestige. When women give money 'they feel a conjugal duty to help the husband in the social context' (Tonda and Daho 1989). Women who work are also engaged in domestic investment for the household. For example, the interior decoration of the home is considered the domain of the wife and she uses it as a projection of herself.

Significance of Women's Strategies

Before focusing on ethnographic examples, it is necessary to clarify women's actions in terms of strategy. The women observed are considered as '*acteurs*' who are constructing or redetermining their own behaviour and '*habitus*'¹⁴ (Bourdieu 1979). The term 'strategy' describes the intention of maximising the possibility of obtaining something or resisting against the will of a husband or neighbours. Women are evaluating the best solution for themselves according to their situation and choose the one, in spite of the risks, that can give them satisfaction or a better position. These Congolese women are making very conscious choices and the unconscious element referred to by Bourdieu in his use of the term '*habitus*' appears to be absent.

In the cases Bourdieu observed, the '*habitus*' does not consciously predetermine

¹⁴'Habitus' refers to the individual unconsciously internalising a set of behaviours and opinions which are activated in society to respond to a social situation. Later these incorporated 'social reflexes' are the foundation of his taste which distinguishes him as a social individual.

actions. In Brazzaville, because of the rapid changes taking place, there is not enough permanence for a set of social or cultural practices to take hold. A change in habits brings a somewhat precarious construction of cultural practices which gives the actor a sense of relativity. When there is no time to internalise their actions fully, actors remain free to pursue various courses of action consciously.

Women's strategies emerge when a specific realm of social or cultural habits is no longer rational either because of environmental change or due to the removal of social constraints which have hitherto imposed a specific code of behaviour. Consequently the women make choices concerning work or other matters that permit 'play' and eventually improve their position. This is Brazzaville women's frame of reference and they influence the social rules for their children.

The woman actor will 'play' (the verb comes from game theory) only if her social position affords her the opportunity. For the internationalised and *petite fonctionnaire* women under consideration, the social environment of the actor is large and the actor can choose to play at more than one level depending on her position at that time. This way Brazzaville's elite women are exploring new positions at work, in gender relations and in the household.

The In-law Factor

There is however one major obstacle in the path of elite women. While their role as income earner is opening new doors, there are certain restrictions on them in terms of their role as childbearers and rearers in matrilineal and patrilineal families, which continually undermine their status in the wider extended family. Elite women's household strategies are informed primarily by the high premium they place on not only having children, but enjoying their enduring love and trust. Women in Brazzaville deeply value having children. This is one of the few ways of being sure of some support in old age or in case of invalidity. Elite women, like Congolese women of other social groups, want to have children and are not adopting European levels of fertility, i.e. giving birth to only one or two children (Jean-Paul Toto 1991).

Congo's explosive politics sporadically bring brutality and violence into women's lives. Yet what women most fear is insecurity surrounding old age and widowhood, rather than any direct physical attack on themselves. Through good economic management they prepare for their future as a widow: a particularly dramatic time for Brazzavillian women when they are subjected to the callous behaviour of their in-laws. A woman is often reproached for being responsible for her husband's death, accused of murdering the brother who should be providing for his natal family with care and money. In-laws' financial hardship under the current economic crisis can lead them to instigate violence towards the bereaved wife. The economic independence many elite

women enjoy because of having a job is resented by their in-laws and can be used as an excuse for callousness.

The in-laws may be seeking revenge for the past. Among the ethnic groups represented in Brazzaville, the Lari and the Vili are matrilineal. The tight relations which exist between brother and sister in the village have repercussions in urban life. Non-working women often request financial support from their brothers when their own husband does not give them enough money. As a sister, they enter into conflict with their brother's spouse. She is accused of not allowing her husband to help his own sister. Economic tensions promote violent discourse and brutal attitudes as sisters try to get assistance from their brothers. Difficult relations do not only occur between a husband and wife but also between a woman and her sisters-in-law. Thus the type of descent and residence accentuates conflicts between in-laws. The weakness of a wife due to her external position in the new family propels her to seek strategies to strengthen her future position.

Not surprisingly, the death of a husband often evokes the beginning of sorcery accusations. The general insecurity of life has increased people's reliance on sorcery as an explanation of causation. Violence by in-laws is feared by women of all social groups.

In the past and still in some villages today, it is the custom to separate a widow from the rest of the village and to seize her house before she is given to her husband's brother (*levirat*)¹⁵ (Vansina 1973). In town, *levirat* practices are still accepted by women with a low level of education or by those lacking financial independence. Women traders are an exception. They are not well educated but their flourishing businesses give them the strength to challenge this practice.

Elite women with their acculturation to western ideas and their attachment to monogamy refuse the *levirat*. However, the loss of a husband still results in in-laws, mainly sisters-in-laws, demanding all of an elite widow's possessions. Knowing that she has to face this uncertainty, a wife prepares for widowhood in two different ways: firstly, by saving money and secondly, by buying a field that is put in the name of one of her children (Mianda 1996). Wills are not respected and there is no legal institution in Congo to uphold them.

Thus, work and the financial benefits which have enlarged the control women have in the household and in their relationship with their partner find limits in the face of the power of lineage descent. A husband's death reinforces the extreme resistance felt towards female independence and can provoke violence. The already mentioned attention women give to securing external support, from associations or friends, helps them to

¹⁵The husband's eldest brother can inherit his widow. If there is no brother, a nephew inherits the widow.

face demanding claims from relatives. Furthermore, a woman tries to circumvent this show of power play and these threats by investing in her children's education as well as legally transferring conjugal property to them while they are still young in order to prevent seizure by in-laws at the time of her husband's death. Certainly, there is no conscious effort by women to reform the system of descent. A gradual evolution towards bilineal filiation is the result of day-to-day survival strategies reinforced by long-term investment in children's education. This specific strategy is found among the internationalised elite women; the *petites fonctionnaires* are less well positioned to get results in this respect.

Female Strategies Towards a Brighter Future

Social mutations within the household are complex because they depend on new material conditions, notably the economic opportunities women now have in Brazzaville as well as the impact of the 'French model' of filiation and the notion of the conjugal couple. This external influence dialectically interacts with internal dynamics creating new social patterns:

La 'fabrique' sociale et culturelle africaine n'a jamais été inactive, elle a constamment eu à produire les sociétés et les cultures nègres en traitant, à la fois, les dynamismes internes et ceux résultant du rapport à l'environnement (Bayard 1989: 35).

A woman's status in the household is heavily determined by the income and prestige derived from her employment. The other important ingredient is the ideological representation of the household's form, especially the conception that the couple have of their relationship. Elite women are attached to the western monogamous model of equality and negotiation with their husband, and they shun the notion that only husbands are the family breadwinners and authority figures. A woman struggling for autonomy is naturally keen to exert more influence over her husband and thereby counteract the tyranny that his sisters and mother exert directly over him and indirectly over her and her children.

A woman's selection of strategies to shape her life into a desired form are intertwined with her life cycle. When she is young, beauty and vitality are used to seduce an appropriate man. Of course, not all young elite women are well positioned to 'win' a man. Divorced women are at a greater disadvantage. They are usually older and have lost time in the 'man-hunting' competition. The following two sub-sections provide descriptions of Brazzavillian female strategies to gain decision-making power in the household and security against old age. The first example is representative of strategies

of the internationalised elite women, whereas the second is more typical of the *petites fonctionnaires*.

An Internationalised Elite Household

Antoinette, a 36-year-old civil servant, typifies the lifestyle of a Brazzavillian internationalised elite woman. After she completed her schooling in Congo, she studied at a university in France. She met and married her husband when they were still in Congo without family intervention. Both families are matrilineal. In Paris, they lived in a flat and had their first son. During their stay in France - which lasted five years - A. bought all the furniture currently in her home in Brazzaville. She is proud that her interior looks like a standard French living-room with a sofa, low coffee table, carpet, TV and a lamp in the corner close to the sofa. The dining-room is also spacious with a high cupboard with display shelves and white chairs around a long table where the whole family eats together. In A.'s family the idea that the woman and children would eat in the kitchen is unthinkable.

This use of living space corresponds to the French middle-class model. In general the internationalised elite households in Congo have adopted European interior decors and furnishings. A. takes extreme care to keep things tidy and in good shape which distinguishes her socially. This sense of interior order is not common in homes in Congo. Besides being a way of asserting her status, A. is very conscious that the furnishings would be difficult to replace since they were all purchased in France. Even if they were available in Brazzaville, the expense would be prohibitive even for the intellectual elite.

A. works at a college as a teacher but the salary she receives is not enough for her to realise all that she would like. To supplement it, she works in the afternoons giving private lessons to her own students. Antoinette's husband is also a civil servant, sometimes travelling to France for his work.

Antoinette has spent all her savings over a period of five years to build a house for her widowed mother who had been thrown out of her own house by her family-in-law. She could have kept her mother at her own home and alternated with her sisters and brothers but A. wanted to be sure of her mother's future and has therefore opted for this solution. This case is not at all an exception and demonstrates the importance of female work showing how women can decide for themselves what to do with the money they earn. When she has finished helping her mother, A. is ready to build up her own household.

As the study of Tonda and Daho (1989) points out, women do not want to spend their whole salary on household needs and they insist that their husbands remain responsible for the rent and food. Vidal's 1978 article '*Guerre des Sexes à Abidjan*'

about the struggle between a married couple to extract money from one another is characteristic of Brazzaville, demonstrating the impact of the current economic crisis.

Antoinette's case is illuminating for she is trying to avoid disagreeing with her husband or at least not challenging him openly. She is convinced that she has to talk directly to him about the welfare of their household to obtain his participation and support in her projects. She wants to keep her husband and live in a westernised way based on confidence, trust and fidelity. This represents a real challenge in the exploitative sexual context of Brazzaville. She is very attached to the monogamous conjugal model and has oriented her strategies in a specific way, while a lot of other women have chosen to buy land to provide security in the case of an eventual separation from their husband. They would not imagine staying with their husband if the relationship was unsatisfactory. Even if Antoinette wanted to buy a field now and build a house on it, she would want to do it with her husband's agreement. Her idea is to involve him in her plans, reinforcing at the same time his place in the household. It is clear that in this case A. is spending a lot of energy bringing her husband in line with her preferences. She eventually wants a house of their own (they were renting).

Because of her education, A. feels that she and her husband are equals in the household. She is recognised by the outside world as '*une dame*' which determines her strategies, and her capacity to work and to save money. In turn, her status is enhanced by a great deal of complicity and trust between her husband and herself. Whether or not the strategy produces the desired result will ultimately depend on her husband. In this particular case the social status of the husband also depends on the good reputation of his wife. He often works with French people and can easily bring them home because A. feels comfortable entertaining foreign visitors.

Internationalised elite women in Brazzaville are well acquainted with the French population in Congo. They read French magazines like '*Femme Actuelle*' where they find summaries of the preoccupations of French middle-class women. This kind of publication circulates from woman to woman and forms a part of the background of the internationalised elite.

Women's strategies are also related to the descent of the husband's family. In the matrilineal family the place of the woman is uncomfortable because she is not well integrated into the husband's family. When a wife is unfaithful to her husband, the family can also try to separate the man from his wife in order to isolate her. The man then usually resides outside the household and can always reduce the amount of money he provides. His absence makes it more complicated for the wife to influence her husband. This kind of pressure can be partly neutralised by women like A. who have 'privatised' their home. Antoinette's strategies are a means of preventing the adverse

influences of the outside world from intruding into her household and a way of escaping extended-family pressures.

The *Deuxième Bureau* Household

The '*deuxième bureau*' refers to an unmarried or divorced woman who has an intimate relationship with a married man and bears his children. It is most commonly associated with women of the local elite. A *deuxième bureau* household has a female partner at its head because the male partner is the head of his 'legal' family. The man contributes financially to the welfare of his extramarital family. Paradoxically, local elite women in *deuxième bureau* households hold the ideal of the monogamous couple. Not unlike other countries in Africa, women without husbands or men in their lives are not considered 'real women' and without children a woman is not fully recognised or respected socially. For the *petites fonctionnaires* the status of *deuxième bureau* is a way of obtaining a partner with a good salary and maybe also social prestige. The inconvenience of not being married to him is compensated for by economic security and by the children she will have with him.

The use of the expression *deuxième bureau* is an old joke in francophone Africa. It not only refers to a man's mistress but it also denotes a woman who has a baby outside marriage. The latter is not unusual in Brazzaville, and it is common amongst *petite fonctionnaire* women as well as some of the internationalised elite. Nevertheless, it has not been socially sanctioned. There is a gap between its actual increasing incidence and the general public's moral acceptance of it (Lacombe 1984). *Petites fonctionnaires* and internationalised elite women's increasing dependence on this household form is not recorded in the statistics, nor is it mentioned in the Congolese *Code de la Famille*. Instead the *deuxième bureau* is popularly conceived in terms of the superficial stereotype of a thieving husband with a big Mercedes car ('Merco drivers'), while the woman is reduced to the caricature of a young lady being led astray by a rich and successful married boyfriend.

In fact some *petites fonctionnaires* and some internationalised elite women have chosen to be *deuxième bureau* through need. Internationalised elite women are known to choose this kind of partnership after a divorce. Amongst both types of elite women, the ideal is a monogamous marriage and even more importantly someone without financial problems who can provide an upper-class way of life. If they cannot find such a person to marry they turn to seducing a married man. In doing so, they forego being married and 'start' family life as *deuxième bureau*. Well-educated, divorced, internationalised elite women who opt for this course nonetheless insist on remaining with their children from their previous marriage. They wish to be the head of a single-parent family. In this case, the *deuxième bureau* is not just a mistress occupying a secondary position in the

life of her lover. As a mother, she is in control of her own 'primary' family. The lover divides his time between his legal family and the new one. Her partner and the father of her children take financial care of the family. The woman and her children live in a good house rented or purchased by the man, if she does not have one of her own. Gifts and welfare are provided by the man but this way of life is possible only at the expense of his legal family.

The female demand for a socially successful man is matched by new demands on the part of men themselves. Men who have become wealthy through politics, business or trade are looking for two things: an educated, intelligent and beautiful wife to be an active partner during social and business meetings; and enough privacy so as not to be disturbed by the numerous demands for help from the extended family. The privatisation of the household is in this case facilitated by having a mistress. A mistress, as opposed to a wife, has the advantage of keeping some distance from the man's family needs. She has more time outside her job for social connections and projects like the purchase of a house or a dressmaking shop to secure her financial future.

These single-parent households differ from polygamy in that the union between the mistress and her lover is not formally sealed. The ideal of an equal division of the husband's gifts between his two women does not hold. The *deuxième bureau* is the one which receives the most money and attention from the man, as well as being protected from any in-laws' feelings of envy and revenge against a legal wife.

The sense of autonomy they have in this household form extends still further. The superior economic support they receive from their lovers takes financial pressure off *deuxième bureau* women such that many have more free time and are not obliged to pursue extra economic activities in the afternoons after normal office hours. *Deuxième bureau* women may receive, as a gift, the house that a wife would have to buy herself to ensure her future. Thus, the *deuxième bureau* option, which at first glance appears heavily biased against the 'second' woman in fact represents a great deal of material advantage for the woman at the same time as offering the man the physical benefits normally associated with an illicit affair as well as a degree of social escape from his natal family.

The success of the *deuxième bureau* rests on the beauty and charm necessary for the act of seduction. These, it could be argued, are ephemeral attributes which, unlike education, fade with age. However, the *deuxième bureau* takes this into account and after gaining material advantage, she judiciously invests for her old age.

New Socialisation and Filiation

The transmission of cultural values through the education of the children is considered to be mainly the task of the mother in Brazzavillian households. Besides their role in

imparting social skills and correct behaviour, mothers are more active in the pursuit of their children's education than the father who spends less time physically in the home. In internationalised elite families the socialisation of the children takes place in the centre of a 'privatised' domestic environment. This individualistic universe is inspired by the lifestyle of the French middle class. Antoinette's experience is illustrative. She gave birth to her first child in France and had her two other children after returning to Congo. The approach to childcare is very different in the two countries, but Antoinette followed the advice she had received in France: '*...De toute facon, la première expérience d'accouchement était en France et je continue donc à faire comme si....*' (Interview with Antoinette, 1990).

The same principles are applied to older children. The mother teaches them proper manners, how to speak good French and behave correctly at table. When Antoinette goes to work a childminder takes care of the youngest children. She does not rely on members of her or her husband's extended family for childcare, whereas in many Congolese households a niece or a sister attending high school is often involved in babysitting duties.

Internationalised elite women want to provide equal educational opportunities for their sons and daughters. Antoinette wants the education she and her husband give to their offspring to result in confident, self-assured children. She is trying to raise independent children and is passing on to them a selective appreciation of Congolese and French culture. Her sense of female decision-making autonomy vis-a-vis her husband and particularly her in-laws is imparted to her children.

Because of the attention paid to childcare and an individualistic lifestyle, internationalised elite women exercise control over the number of children they have. They tend to consider three children as ideal, in defiance of the extended family's desire for numerous children. The extended family rejects this position and endeavours to convince the husband to be more assertive towards his wife. Women retaliate with covert strategies to avoid pregnancy.

While A. is an extreme case in totally avoiding extended-family childcare assistance, most internationalised elite women who come from matrilineal families are very selective about who they will entrust with their children. They are not willing to transmit matrilineal rules of filiation. This departure from a traditional socialisation of children is related to the desire of the mother to be closer to her children. To become closer to one's own children in a matrilineal family demands a defensive attitude towards the matrilineal members of the extended family who have 'natural' authority over the children. In a single-parent household, the woman has more freedom to organise her children's education because she alone makes all the decisions. What could be termed the 'privatisation of the family' is part and parcel of a change in children's sense of

filiation. Increasingly, children are restrictively under the authority and care of their parents rather than the extended family. French and more general western influences gained from school or television accelerate children's dependence on their parents and weaken the role of the uncle in the matrilineal descent of the Kongo ethnic group and the patrilineal extended family of the Mbochi. In so doing, the distinction between patrilineal and matrilineal forms of filiation is fading in urban areas.

Conclusions

Congo has maintained strong relations with France and the Congolese elite are attracted to the French way of life. Elite women are characterised by their ability to interpret and use these two cultural backgrounds and find some '*espaces de liberté*' in the household. Salaried work and the status it gives them have altered forever the collective idea of female devotion to unpaid work.

First of all, the marked ideal for monogamy places the wife on an equal footing with the husband and the conjugal couple counterbalance extended-family pressures. These strategies are therefore effective in changing gendered relations and male attitudes. Where it has not been possible for a woman to realise the ideal of a conjugal couple or alternatively following a divorce, she prefers to live alone or to be the concubine of a married man. In this case the woman cannot be seen just as a mistress, which is not the reality, but as a partner in a relationship of mutual exchange, and the head of a household. Within this rather anomalous structure, both the woman and her husband achieve a degree of independence from their extended families.

In more conventional households with a male head, elite women are clearly negotiating with their husbands about their status and decision making. A salary gives the mother/wife financial power within the household and ostensibly changes her relationship with other members of the nuclear family. Although the urban context is appropriate for challenging habits, the effect of socio-economic instability also liberates women's strategies from familial domination.

Women's conscious actions reduce their husband's and his family's involvement in the household and have generated a significant privatisation of the household in Brazzaville. Even before marriage, elite women reject their objectification in matrimonial exchange between the bride and groom's families. Instead they prefer personal 'love matches'. In marriage, they structure family life and especially the socialisation of their children in order to marginalise the extended family. This privatisation tendency is amplified in the *deuxième bureau's* household because the concubine is not obliged to take part in clientelism towards her lover's family and friends. However, it should be noted that the privatisation of the household is in line with the society-wide tendency towards individualisation and a decline in gift giving. When gifts are given, they are no

longer reciprocated because of the economic crisis (Marie 1996).

In addition to the strengthening of the relationship with their husbands/lovers vis-a-vis the extended family, women as mothers are creating tight links with their children in order to maintain their support. The special attention given to children in diverse domains has consequences for matrilineal filiation. In Brazzaville today, the solutions concerning widowhood remain personal and follow very individual strategies in view of women's differing income-earning positions. However, even the most economically autonomous women are placed in a paradoxical situation: the disappearance of a husband through death is more prejudicial to their autonomous, economic well-being than his presence. In other words, all matrilineally widowed women are vulnerable to the envious demands of their in-laws.

Changes due to women's strategies have unexpected effects. First, there has been an increase in the amount of time spent outside the house in order to work at an extra job or to join '*associations d'entraide*' reinforcing the trend of leaving children alone or under the supervision of a paid babysitter. Second, some husbands are benefiting from the nuclearisation of the household and are able to hide themselves from kinship pressures and the material demands of family and friends. The privatisation of the household leads to an early transmission of wealth to children as a means of safeguarding a women's access to conjugal, or even her own, property after her husband's death. In fact, this practice transforms matrilineal descent to unilineal descent through the mother.

This analysis of new Brazzavillian trends is a contribution to the study of African urban change. It is important to take into account individual strategies as a means for the new social elite to shape their environment and improve their strategic positions. Congo is undergoing a transition from small-scale, community life to larger-scale, urban life and within this society the individualisation of the elite is a pronounced tendency. Paradoxically as the economic interdependence of urbanisation expands, the size and mutual support within elite families is shrinking. Women are at the centre of this social movement.

References

- ANTOINE, P. (1991), 'Structures familiales, cycle de vie et crise économique à Dakar'. In: *Maîtrise de la croissance démographique et développement en Afrique*, Séminaire international ENSEA-ORSTOM, Abidjan, 26-29 Nov. 1991
- AUGER, A. (1981), 'Congo'. In: H. de Blij & E. Martin, eds, *African Perspectives: The Economic Geography of Nine African States*, pp. 193-225, New York: Methuen
- BAYART, J.F. (1989), *L'Etat en Afrique. La politique du ventre*. Paris: Gallimard
- BALANDIER, G. (1955), *Sociologie des Brazzavilles Noires*. Paris: Presse de la fondation nationale des sciences politiques
- BAZANGUISA, R. (1992), 'La sape et la politique au Congo'. *Journal des Africanistes*, vol. 62, no. 1, 151-157
- BOURDIEU, P. (1979), *La Distinction. Critique sociale du jugement*. Paris: Minuit
- COQUET-ROUGIER, E. (1985), 'Contrôle masculin, exclusivité féminine dans une société patrilinéaire'. In: *Afrique actuelle, Afrique plurielle*, pp. 153-180, Paris: Karthala
- CROZIER, M. & E. FRIEDBERG (1977), *L'acteur et le système. Les contraintes de l'action collective*. Paris: Seuil
- DINAN, C. (1978), 'Pragmatists or Feminists? The Professional Single Women in Accra, Ghana'. *Les Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*. pp. 155-176, Paris
- DURKHEIM, E. (1977), *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*. (1st ed. 1937) Paris: PUF
- ETIENNE, M. & E. LEACOCK (1980), *Women and Colonisation. Anthropological Perspectives*. New York: Praeger
- FANON, F. (1952), *Peau noire masques blancs*. Paris: Seuil
- GRUÉNAIS, M.E. (1991), *Les 'autres parents': Parenté et structure des ménages à Brazzaville (Congo)*. Conference entitled 'Femme, famille et population'. Vol. 2 6-24, UEPA 24-29 April 1991, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso
- GRUÉNAIS, M.E., J. TONDA, & M.M. FLORENT (1995), 'Messies, Fétiches et lutte de pouvoirs entre les "grands hommes" du Congo démocratique'. *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* vol. 137, no. XXXV-1, 163-193
- KAUDJHIS-OFFOUMOU, F. (1994), *Mariage en Côte d'ivoire. De la polygamie à la monogamie*. Abidjan: Kof
- LACOMBE, B. (1984), 'Le Deuxième Bureau', *Stateco 35 Septembre*, Paris
- MACGAFFEY, J. (1987), *Entrepreneurs et Parasites. The Struggle for Indigenous Capitalism in Zaïre*. Cambridge University Press
- MARIE, A. (1996), 'Les jeunes d'Abidjan face à l'entrée dans la vie dans un contexte de pauvreté'. *Cahier MARJUVIA*, pp. 23-31, Paris
- MAYER, R. (1992), *Histoire de la famille gabonaise*. Centre Culturel Français Saint-Exupéry, Libreville, Gabon

- MENGA, G. (1993), *Congo. La transition escamotée*. Paris, L'Harmattan
- MIANDA, G. (1996), *Femmes africaines et pouvoir. Les maraichères de Kinshasa*. Paris, L'Harmattan
- OPPONG, C. & A. ADEPOJU, (eds) (1994), *Gender, Work & Population in Sub-Saharan Africa*. ILO, Currey
- PARAVANO, P. (1993), *Les stratégies économiques et sociales des femmes salariées de Brazzaville (Congo)* PhD Thesis, Paris
- PIERMAY, J.L. (1993), *Citadins en Quête du sol dans les villes d'Afrique Centrale*. Paris. L'harmattan
- TONDA, J. & E. DAHO (1989), 'Le salaire de l'épouse congolaise'. *Congo Magazine*, 21 March, pp. 55-58, Brazzaville
- TOTO, J.P. (1991), 'Impact du planning familial et des programmes de santé sur la croissance démographique au Congo'. In: *Maitrise de la croissance démographique et développement en Afrique*, Séminaire international ENSEA-ORSTOM, Abidjan, 26-29 Nov. 1991
- VANSINA, J. (1973), *The Tio Kingdom of Middle Congo 1880-1892*. Oxford, Oxford University Press
- VIDAL, C. (1978), 'Guerre des sexes à Abidjan. Masculin, Féminin, CFA'. *Les Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* pp. 121-153, Paris

ASC Working Papers

1	Laurens van der Laan	Modern inland transport and the European trading firms in colonial West Africa. 1980	Dfl. 2.50
2	Klaas de Jonge	Relations paysans, pêcheurs, capitalisme, état. Une étude d'une lutte de classe en Casamance (Sud Sénégal). 1980	out of print
3	Gerti Hesseling	Etat et langue en Afrique. Esquisse d'une étude juridique comparative. 1981	Dfl. 2.50
4	Els van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal-Baerends & Emile van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal	Conciliation et la qualité des relations sociales chez les Anufim du NordTogo en Afrique de l'Ouest. 1981	out of print
5	Piet Konings	Peasantry and state in Ghana. The example of the Veia Irrigation Project in the Upper Region of Ghana. 1981	out of print
6	C.A. Muntjewerff	The producers' price system and the coffee and cocoa trade at village level in West Africa. 1982	Dfl. 2.50
7	C.A. Muntjewerff	Produce marketing cooperatives in West Africa. 1982	Dfl. 2.50
8	Emile van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal & Els van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal-Baerends	La Parcelle du Gendre comploteur. Manières coutumières et modernes d'acquérir des droits sur la terre, à N'zara (Nord Togo). 1982	Dfl. 3.50
9	B. Merx	Zonder bloed geen vliegen. 1985	out of print
10	Laurens van der Laan	Cameroon's main marketing board: History and scope of the ONCPB. 1987	Dfl. 5.00
11	Laurens van der Laan	Cocoa and coffee buying in Cameroon: The role of the marketing board in the South-West and North-West Provinces, 1978-1987. 1988	Dfl. 5.00
12	Cyprien F. Fisiy	Palm tree justice in the Bertoua Court of Appeal: The witchcraft cases. 1990	Dfl. 5.00
13	Laurens van der Laan & Wim van Haaren	African marketing boards under structural adjustment: The experience of Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s. 1990	Dfl. 5.00

14	Rob Buijtenhuijs	The revolutionary potential of African peasantries: Some tentative remarks. 1991	Dfl 5.00
15	Deborah Fahy Bryceson & John Howe	Rural household transport in Africa: Reducing the burden on women? 1993	Dfl 5.00
16	Deborah Fahy Bryceson	Easing rural women's working day in Sub-Saharan Africa. 1993	Dfl 5.00
17	Rob Buijtenhuijs & Elly Rijnierse	Demokratisering in Afrika ten zuiden van de Sahara (1989-1992). Deel 1: Een becommentarieerd overzicht van de literatuur. Deel 2: Onderzoekscapaciteiten in Afrika en in het Westen. 1993	out of print
18*	Nina Tellegen	Rural employment in Sub-Saharan Africa. A bibliography. 1993	out of print
19*	Deborah Fahy Bryceson	De-Agrarianization and rural employment generation in sub-Saharan Africa: Process and prospects. 1993	Dfl 5.00
20*	Deborah Fahy Bryceson & Corine van der Laan	De-agrarianization and rural employment in Africa. Proceedings of the "De-agrarianization and Rural Employment" Workshop held at the Afrika-Studiecentrum, Leiden, May 1994. 1994	Dfl. 5.00
21	Deborah Fahy Bryceson & M. McCall	Lightening the load: Women's labour and appropriate rural technology in Sub-Saharan Africa. 1994	Dfl. 5.00
22	Tjalling Dijkstra	Food trade and urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa: From the early Stone Age to the structural adjustment era. 1995	Dfl 5.00
23*	Patricia Paravano	Working for the future: Elite women's strategies in Brazzaville. 1997	Dfl. 5.00
24*	R.J.A. Berkvens	Backing two horses: Interaction of agricultural and non-agricultural household activities in a Zimbabwean communal area. 1997	Dfl. 5.00
25*	M. Demeke	Rural non-farm activities in impoverished communities: The case of North Shoa, Ethiopia. 1997	Dfl. 5.00
26*	C.G. Mung'ong'o	Coming full circle: Agriculture, non-farm activities and the resurgence of out-migration in Njombe District, Tanzania 1998	Dfl. 5.00

27*	Ndalahwa F. Madulu	Changing lifestyles in farming societies of Sukumaland: Kwimba District, Tanzania 1998	Dfl. 5.00
28*	George Jambiya	The dynamics of population, land scarcity, agriculture and non-agricultural activities: West Usambara Mountains, Lushoto District, Tanzania 1998	Dfl. 5.00
29*	Davis Mwamfupe	Changing village land, labour and livelihoods: Rungwe and Kyela Districts, Tanzania 1998	Dfl. 5.00
30	Dick Foeken & Alice Mboganie Mwangi	Farming in the City of Nairobi 1998	Dfl. 5.00
31	Wijnand Klaver & Robert Mwadime	Food consumption and nutrition in the Kenya Coast 1998	Dfl. 5.00
32*	Cecil Manona	De-agrarianisation and the urbanisation of a rural economy: Agrarian patterns in Melani Village in the Eastern Cape 1999	Dfl. 10.00
33*	Pat McAllister	Agriculture and cooperative labour in Shixini, Transkei 1999	Dfl. 10.00
34*	Leslie Bank	No visible means of subsistence: Rural livelihoods, gender and de-agrarianisation in the Eastern Cape 1999	Dfl. 10.00

* **These Working Papers are all publications of the DARE Research Programme**

Copies can be ordered from: African Studies Centre
attn. Karl Dorrepaal
P.O. Box 9555
2300 RB Leiden
The Netherlands
tel. +31 71 5273490
fax +31 71 5273344
e-mail dorrepaal@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

Forthcoming Working Papers

Income Diversification in the Semi-Arid Zone of Nigeria: Gigane Sokoto Northwest Nigeria
by M.A. Iliya

Not Farms Alone: A Study of Rural Livelihoods in the Middle Belt of Nigeria
by Mohammed-Bello Yunusa

De-Agrarianisation and Rural Employment in Rural Igboland of South Eastern Nigeria: A Case Study
of
Osumenyi Nnewi South Local Government
by Barth Chukwuezi

If the Drumming Changes, the Dance Also Changes: De-Agrarianisation and Rural Non-Farm
Employment in the Nigerian Savannah
by Kate Meagher

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back: Cocoa Farming and Income Diversification in South-western
Nigeria
by Abdul Raufu Mustapha

Books

The following books have recently been published by the DARE Research Programme:

Bryceson, D.F. and V. Jamal (eds) 1997
Farewell to Farms: De-Agrarianisation and Employment in Africa
Aldershot: Ashgate, 265 pp., Price: £16.50

Tellegen, N. 1997
Rural Enterprises in Malawi: Necessity or Opportunity?
Aldershot: Ashgate, 249 pp., Price: £22.50

If you are interested in purchasing any of our books, place your order with:
Ashgate Publishing Ltd,
Gower House,
Croft Road,
Aldershot,
Hampshire GU11 3HR,
England

(Please include a £2.50 postal charge per copy on an order of less than 3 books.)