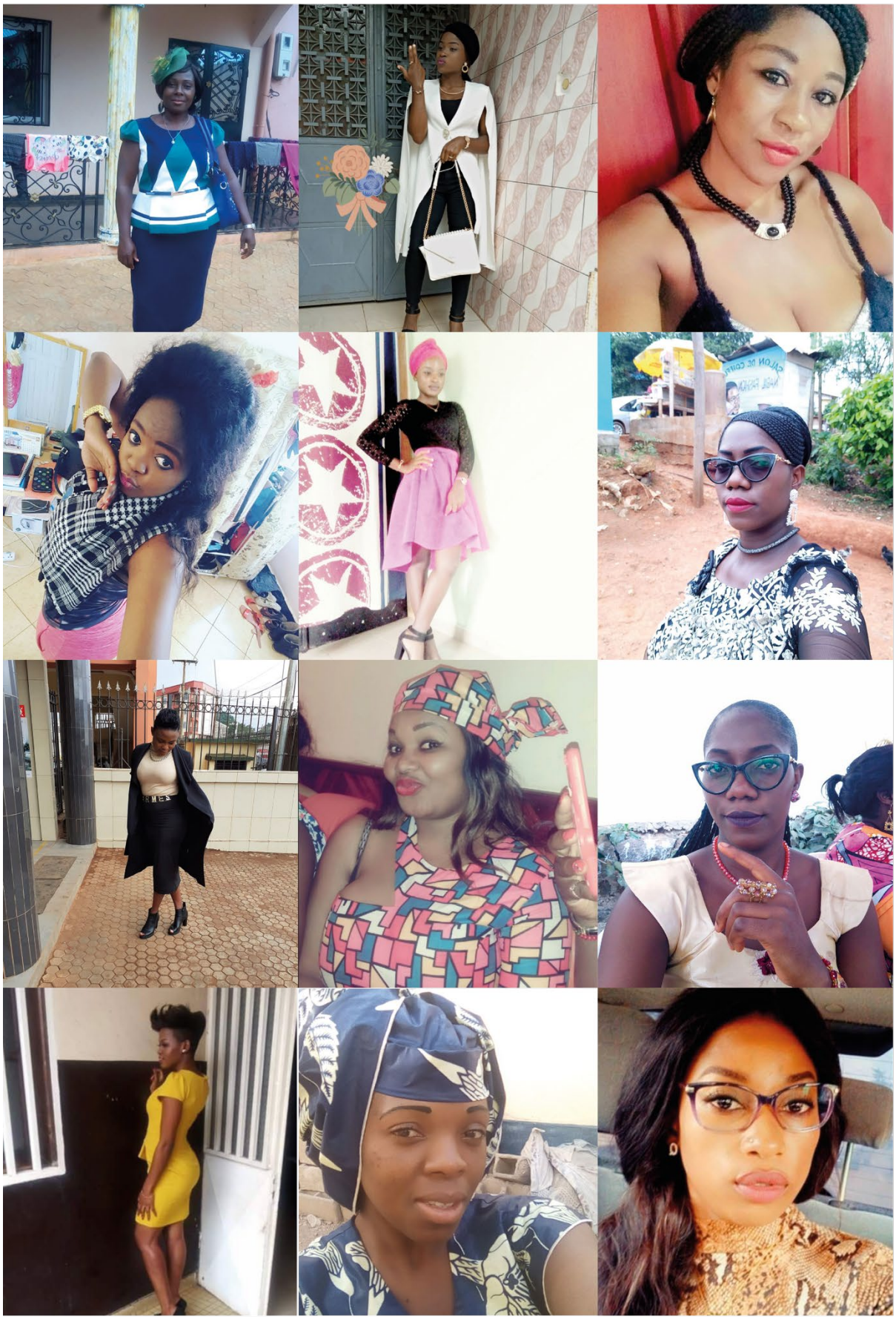
Beauty work:
consumption, gender and hope in Yaoundé, Cameroon

Ewa Barbara Majczak

Wolfson College

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Anthropology, University of Oxford

Trinity Term 2020



INTRODUCTION 9

1. Social (in)visibility 13
2. Fashioning visual selves 20
3. Female subjectivities 27
4. Uncertainty and agency 34
5. Introduction to the fieldsite 39
6. Research methods 44
7. Chapter outline 50

ONE: MAKING BEAUTY 53

1. Faire le nyanga 57
2. Aesthetics of prestige 60
3. Aesthetics of respectability 66
4. What beauty measures 76
5. Conclusion 88

TWO: FASHIONING SEDUCTIVENESS 91

1. The campaign 95
2. Risky pleasures 101
3. Dressing sexualities 106
4. Technologies of (dis)enchantment 110
5. Conclusion 119

THREE: FASHIONING RESPECTABILITY 122

1. To dress for respect 124
2. Fashionistas 129
3. Wealth in followers 135
4. Conclusion 147

FOUR: FASHIONING HOPE 150

1. "Women love photographs" 155
2. Posing 159
3. On reverie 166
4. Entertaining hope 176
5. Conclusion 180

FIVE: ENTREPRENEURS OF LOVE 183

1. Catching a husband offline 187
2. Catching a *gars* online 194
3. Layers of attractiveness 199
4. Love burnout 207

5. CONCLUSION 211

CONCLUSION 214

1. FABRICATING FEMININITIES 217
2. BEAUTY WORK 222
3. AESTHETIC SUBJECTIVITIES 224
4. PERFORMING HOPE 226

Abstract

Against the backdrop of trade and media liberalisation following the end of the Cold War, this dissertation examines visual self-fashioning among young Bamiléké women struggling to attain social adulthood in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It asks why young women living in precarious conditions invest in beauty, dress and photographs of themselves to the extent they do. In order to answer this question, the thesis, moves beyond semiotic understandings of consumption and analyses self-fashioning in embodied and material terms. From this perspective, investments in beauty, dress and photographs not only index dreams and imaginations, but emerge as a set of skills and embodied knowledge that I propose to call "beauty work". Each chapter examines different skills and collectively illustrate how, through their investments, young women can alter their social positions and create upward paths of social mobility. Thus, for young women beauty, dress and photographs became means by which to fashion and refashion social adulthood in a social, economic and political context where other paths—as employment and education—are compromised.

In developing the notion of beauty work, this thesis contributes to the anthropological and Africanist literature on consumption, gender and hope. First, it challenges understanding of consumption as imitation in semiotic terms and argues for an understanding of imitation as valued skills and embodied knowledge in relation to notions of personhood. Second, insofar as beauty work encompasses skills, it reveals women as industrious. Thus, this thesis challenges understandings of beauty work in terms of empowerment versus resistance and instead discusses how female aesthetic subjectivities through beauty work are being made. The discussion foregrounds notion of femininity as a skill for crafting surface and in doing so illustrates how beauty work defies patriarchal and colonial regimes of recognition. Third, insofar as beauty work relies on newness, it redirects the temporality of embodied knowledge to the not-yet. Thus, this thesis argues, visual self-fashioning is performative of embodied hope when young women dress and photograph themselves to fashion social adulthood. Together the three arguments by drawing out the key role of the body, skills and the senses offer a new approach to understanding of investments in consumer capitalism for young women from Western Africa in particular, and in doing so illuminate workings of aesthetic capitalism in general.

Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without women of all age in Yaoundé, Cameroon and villages around Mbouda, who befriended me and shared with me the joys and concerns of their lives. Adelaide, her sisters, friends and wider family took care of me, made their networks available and simply made me feel in Yaoundé at home. Adelaide's resilience, courage and distance towards everyday challenges of life in Yaoundé inspired me. Laurence, Germaine, and Doriane taught me a lot about relations between women, values of sisterhood but also relations between women and men. Their arguments and laughter resounds in the pages that follow. Bene and Daisy and their female kin were there to instruct me about pleasures and pain of fashion and made sure I spoke Ngiemboon. Stella and Manuella taught me how to navigate the city, navigate multiple relations, accompanied me to many seamstresses and photographic studios and taught me how to and how not to pose with and without a phone. Vicky, Monique, Elize had patience with my clumsy hands and invited to join their workshop at their association, Amies Solidares. The debates, mutual help and all female parties provided me with constant stimulation and inspiration for thinking through category of gender and gendered relationships and I am forever indebted to everyone whom I debated and danced with during the association meetings. Doniale and Emma made me fall into their traps and taught me their wit. Their mother, grandmother and father explained to me in a repetitive, engaged and funny fashion "the things of the village". Thanks for their intelligence and patience with my endless questions. Thanks too for their humour: their jokes keep me smiling every time I put on a raincoat today. Thanks to members of all village associations of Babajou, Bamissengue and Batcham in Yaoundé for letting me in and helping me out.

This thesis also would have not happened without my assistants. Annie, Arnoux, Ghiselain and Pamela all helped me at different stages in different ways and travelled with me to villages. I was extremely lucky to have Felicite on my side throughout the whole stay both as a fellow researcher, collaborator and as a friend. Her intelligence, wittiness, integrity and values made me question my own ideas and inspired the many words I wrote in the next pages. Thanks for all you offered and keep on offering to me and keep on inspiring others as you do. Jacob helped with many translations and took care of me while in villages and in Mbouda. In Yaoundé everyone with whom I lived in the Theatre Othni is to be thanked for the many beers, political debates and loud laughter through the nights. I am especially grateful to Valery for making sure I am safe as he walked up the road each time to pick me up in the evenings and nights, and

Edith for making sure I improve my cooking skills as we chopped ingredients together for the many Cameroonian dishes I tried to cook. I am very lucky that now you lead your lives in my proximity. Francois Ebouele and Martin Ambara are to be thanked for sharing their knowledge about Cameroon abundantly with me. Carine taught me to dance the "traditional" dances—thanks so much: I had so much fun (and you, laughter!). Annie helped with language issues. Antoine Socpa and Flavien Ndonko are to be thanked for the anthropological discussions and ethnographic advice and their availability and help when I needed it. Thanks to Antoine and Bronhilda for all invitations to participate in family events, happy and sad, in Yaoundé and in the Western Region. Seraphin Assungo is to be thanked immensely for all his help with Ngombale and Dr. Prosper Djiafeua for his help with Ngiemboon. Sophia Memphuh discussed my ideas and shared hers.

In Oxford I would like to thank my supervisors for intellectual but also personal support when the time was challenging and rough. David was patient and supportive of all my intellectual meanderings though our meetings often left me even with more questions than answers! Many thanks for being extremely available, supportive, funny and understanding at all times. Chris's insistence on simplifying my writing and appreciation of my speaking skills was both a good investment and increased my confidence. Marion read different chapters and always provided incisive and encouraging comments. Thanks for your interest, support and confidence when my personal circumstances proved challenging. David Pratten and Thomas Hendricks provided useful feedback during confirmation. In Oxford and beyond others have shared generously their advice. Julie Archambault and Katrien Pype both provided very helpful intellectual advice during the writing up. Michael Rowlands generously discussed my ideas. Jean Pierre Warnier and Dominique Malaquais kindly met me in Paris and provided feedback on my research and ideas before I went off to the field. In the field Pamela Feldman-Savelsberg, Hudita Mustafa and Juliet Gilbert provided helpful advice over email.

Parts of this thesis were presented at different conferences and benefited from the comments of the discussants and wider audience. Chapter 2 benefited from the comments of Peter Geschiere at the panel on sexuality at EASA (2017), chapter 4 from discussion following the talk I gave at the University of Leuven (2018), chapter 5 from comments by Jennifer Cole and other participants of the workshop on Powers of Love in Zanzibar (2019).

Friends and colleagues from Oxford and elsewhere discussed different ideas and/or read chapters or their parts, and/or provided useful thesis advice: Jenny was a great supporter throughout the whole DPhil, Leanne offered incisive comments on the chapters, Catharine on the introduction and conclusion; Akanksha gave food for thought. Romelia read parts of the thesis, Ina discussed issues of hope, Hannah D. and Hannah H. offered encouragement while Fatima helped me find just words. Marco's friendship, support and cheering made me maintain my optimism in the moments of doubt while his notes provided and sustained my intellectual engagement and made me laugh. Emma was and is there when I need any sort of advice through her unique combination of intellectual and personal skills. Thanks to both of you for your friendship and care. Marlene is a wonderful friend and an inspiring and bright academic who read many parts of this thesis, provided intellectual stimulation, and all sorts of advice. Thanks for many hours of working together across different types of Brussels "living rooms".

In Krakow my family and friends were always there when I needed them since this adventure has stated. Thanks to my mother for her presence and help with Lena's sickness and daunting periods of hospitalisation and thanks for flying over to take care of her every time we needed her. My grandmother is such a role model with her energy and skills in old age. Thanks for all the warmth conversations about life across generations, for keeping me up to date with the Polish political life and for ceaseless amounts of tasty food! My sister helped me pull up when time was tough, and always provides me with necessary distance to work and life. My father's unexpected departure has changed our lives in many ways and his presence is greatly missed. If he could not see the moment when this adventure ends, his influence, wit and challenge will always remain with me. Magda's friendship sustained me for many years, her support and curiosity about my work helped me to go on when my father passed away. I am forever grateful for these years of friendship and waiting for more common adventures to come.

Laurent is a friend, lover, husband, a debate partner with whom I laugh, joke, argue and quarrel for many years. Thanks for helping me to sustain the discipline. Lena came to reshuffle our lives and teaches us so much about the world and ourselves. Her intelligence, energy and curiosity enchant us every single day. This thesis is dedicated to her.



Figure 1. The Hairdresser of Stars, where Bene went to get her hair styled. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

INTRODUCTION

Early one Saturday morning, Bene opened her mother's stall at the Acacia market located in Biyem Assi, the southern district of Yaoundé. Her mother, who sold children's clothes, had travelled to Douala, Cameroon's economic capital and port, to purchase goods. When she asked Bene, the eldest of five siblings, to take her place at the stall, her daughter could not refuse. Her brother was studying that day while her younger sister minded the other siblings. Saturday was often considered the best time for customers. As we chatted through the morning, several customers passed by. Bene was skilled in convincing passers-by to approach her stall, both through verbal ululations and by arranging an attractive display of the items she sold. She explained to me that marvelling at all those colours and glitter would surely draw everyone's attention as she arranged the garments so, as she put it, they "hit" the eye. A few hours passed, and suddenly Bene stood up and announced that she had to go to a hairdresser. She blocked the entrance to the shop by putting a long-handled mop across it. Then she asked a friend of her

mother selling few stalls away to “bip” her—to call her mobile phone but hang up after a single ring, to alert her but avoid phone charges—if a customer came.

It took us some time to squeeze through busy alleys, cross the road and finally reach the salon called the Hairdresser of Stars (figure 1). Located in a self-standing structure, its glass entrance was covered with posters of global and local celebrities: Janet Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, Michelle Obama, Lady Ponce and Charlotte Dipanda. Crossing the doorstep, Bene greeted the owner of the shop, a hairdresser from the same village as her mother, who styled hair for all the members of Bene’s close family including her mother. We waited on a plush couch amidst the sounds of hairdryers, music and gossip by other clients and hairdressers. Bene harried them to start her hairstyle just as her telephone bipped. It was the neighbour from the stall: “a customer has come,” Bene murmured. Her initial hesitation about what to do quickly dissipated as her turn to take the hairdresser’s chair finally came up. “I want a *coupe Chinoise*,” (Chinese cut) she announced decisively, and showed her new short black-and-red extensions. To Bene’s dismay the hairdresser judged them insufficient. Bene’s android phone rang again. “It is the neighbour from the stall,” she announced with despair, but continued giving precise directions to the hairdresser about the directions her weavy fringe should take to cover up for the insufficient extensions.

Two hours passed, and we were still at the salon. It was late afternoon. Bene was now sitting under the hairdryer to fix her new hairstyle. The hair mask was itchy, making small tears run from her eyes. Her phone rang again. As she did not have phone credit, she asked her hairdresser to call the neighbour back. The hairdresser handed her own phone over and muted the loud music coming from Nollywood TV, but kept her own eyes glued to the screen where a videoclip of Charlotte Dipanda was now playing. “I’m on the way,” Bene said. As the last touches of wax made her hairstyle shine, she glanced proudly at the mirror. Everyone else turned their heads, following Bene’s new look, and she left the salon walking slowly like a star on the catwalk. As we crossed the street and passed by a splendid house she stopped, took out her android phone and asked me to take a photo of her, instructing me to include her necklace but not her old T-shirt. She posed against the house as a background. The phone rang again and she started to run, but then slowed down, explaining it could “destabilise” her new hair.

Why did Bene leave her mother's stall on the busiest day, when sales would surely be good, to have a new hairstyle made—a lengthy and costly operation?[1] This thesis tells the story of young women like Bene who, living in the precarious economic and political conditions of post-Cold War Cameroon (Konings 2011, Piot 2010), heavily invested in beauty, fashion and photographs despite their own and their families' limited financial resources. How, in the particular context this thesis describes, should we think about the persistent endeavours and investments young women belonging to the Bamiléké ethnic group make in beauty and style? How should we consider their insistence on photographing themselves constantly, as Bene explained: "each time in new clothes"?[2] How are these photographs taken, and what do young women do with them? That is, what means do dress and photographs afford for young Bamiléké women and to what ends are they put? In other words, how do young Bamiléké women fashion their selves and social relations visually, in particular through beauty, dresses and photographs? These are the central questions of this thesis.

Moving beyond semiotic approaches to self-fashioning this thesis analyses how young women fashion their selves and social relations through dresses and photographs in embodied and material terms. Through this I examine how and what dress and photographs represent but also how they are used and the effects these achieve when they are displayed and circulated. This implies asking what dresses and photographs do and afford to do. In this way, I aim to explore how young Bamiléké women in post-Cold War Cameroon come to embody certain aesthetic subjectivities and fashion social relations through the ways in which they imagine and employ their bodies and their extensions: dress and photographs, or, their multiple social skins (Turner 1980, Warnier 2007, Goffman 1990 [1956]).

To understand young women's investments in visual self-fashioning this thesis makes three arguments.

First, I argue that visual self-fashioning is a set of visual skills, embodied knowledge and practices (Taussig 1992, Ferguson 1999), which I call *beauty work*. Beauty work in this thesis encompasses both the work necessary to produce beauty and the work that beauty does—that

1. The price of hair extensions can range from 1,000 to 10,000 FCFA (1,000 FCFA - 1.5 Euro or 1.8 USD) depending on the quality, while a visit to a hair salon costs 2,000–15,000 FCFA, depending on the amount of work required and the standing of the salon. Here Bene paid 3,000 FCFA and promised to bring another 2,000 FCFA, while her original, inadequate hair extensions cost another 2,000 FCFA.
2. New clothes do not necessarily mean clothes which have never been worn, but to a new arrangement which may be of brand-new clothes or of second-hand or borrowed clothes (see Hansen 2000).

is the sensory effects it generates (i.e. imitation is understood as embodied skill as in craft). Framed in this way, the thesis shows how beauty work enabled young women's upward social mobility subverting hierarchies of gender and generation by accumulating "wealth in men" and "wealth in followers" (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Thus, visual self-fashioning does not only represent young women's dreams or aspirations (e.g. Weiss 1999) but is a part and parcel of young women's being-in-becoming (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012) underpinned by notions of personhood (Guyer 1993, Rowlands 1994, Nyamnjoh 2002).

Second, as young women engage in beauty work, femininity and gender emerges not as an interior bodily essence but as an outcome of exterior performance (Butler 1990). It is a skill for crafting alluring surfaces—what is appreciated is how dresses and photographs are skilfully made, or how the body wears a dress[3]. The valuation of visual self-fashioning in terms of skills that compose beauty work solicits appreciation of fabrication and reveals young women as industrious (Amadiume 1987). As young women skilfully make their bodies, dresses and photographs beautiful, they both unsettle and reiterate wider regimes of female body valuation as object for display rehearsing patriarchal discourses and hierarchical gender relations association with market capitalism, the Cameroonian nation-state and the Catholic Church (Tonda 2005). Thus, beauty work, in this thesis, defies interpretations of reinforcement or rejection of gender norms and instead reveals how gender and aesthetic subjectivities are made.

I further suggest that the persistence of young Bamiléké women's investments in beauty work should be understood in terms of "getting ready to take a chance": as attempts to create "openings" and accumulate "wealth in prospects" amidst uncertainty of desired outcomes related to work and marriage (Johnson-Hanks 2005, 2017, Guyer 2005, 1995). That is, young women act so as to increase possibilities for upward social mobility in a context of pervasive uncertainty about the future, for respectability amidst reputational risks transactional sex might bring (Cole 2004), and marriageability in a context where marriage is simultaneously desirable, fraught with ambivalence and hard to achieve or sustain. Insofar as creation of 'openings' through beauty work redirects temporality of embodied to the not-yet, I argue that investments in self-fashioning—largely through the consumption of commodities at the affordable prices

3. I use the notion of craft as skilled work requiring materials, bodily praxis and apprenticeship, as well as creativity and imagination, rather than framing it as merely a technical or mechanical execution of operational sequences (Ingold 2010). The notion of craft as opposed to art and its higher faculties of imagination, as Ingold points out, goes back to Plato and was reinvigorated in the Renaissance, further introducing oppositions between artists and artisans, artwork and artefact, art and technology (2010). Focusing on skills and their outcomes (here crafted surfaces), allows us to go beyond such binaries and see art as technology and technology as art (Ingold 2010, see also Gell 1988, 1992).

made available by market neoliberalisation in the post-Cold war era (Konings 2011, Piot 2010)—also embody hope for these young women (cf. Miyazaki 2006). This embodied hope is performative: young women beautify, dress and photograph their bodies "each time they have something new" feeling they can thereby move out of "waithood" (Honwana 2005). And some partly do.

Before moving onto the conceptual premises of this thesis, I will outline the context in which young Bamiléké women aim to make themselves visible through beauty, dress and photographs.

Social (in)visibility

My interlocutors in this thesis comprise young women from the Bamiléké ethnic group from the Grassfields in the Western Region of Cameroon. In order to understand why young Bamiléké women invest in beauty, dress and photographs, we must first look at how this social group is constituted, and what it might mean to perceive oneself through the interrelated categories of youth, gender and ethnicity in urban Cameroon.

First, if young women in particular feel they are socially (in)visible, this is related to one of the broader social categories they belong to: youth. This axis of social (in)visibility is two-fold: it relates both to the global predicament of young people today (Honwana 2012) and to the social status of being junior among Bamiléké (Warnier 2007).

Young women are seemingly "stuck" in what Honwana calls "waithood" (2012), that is, struggling to achieve socially valued forms of social adulthood, defined as a status that links marriage, reproduction—"the ability to transmit vital substances" (Warnier 1994, 2007)—as well as work and employment. This so-called "crisis of becoming" (Mbembe 2001) is related to a lack of economic opportunities for both young women and men. The lack of, or barriers to, desirable employment—for example, in offices or trade—curtails ways for women to demonstrate the industriousness and entrepreneurship which are valued skills by Bamiléké for upward social mobility promises they are perceived to offer (Warnier 1993, den Ouden 1997). The difficulty of entering into work in the postcolony is compounded by the necessity of climbing up the patrimonial networks of a gerontocratic state (Bayart 1982), often

independently of one's education and skills, that are highly gendered, encouraging transactional sex for young women and thus bringing reputational risks for the self and for kin.

Many commentators have noted the decay of the Cameroonian economy and political system since the privatisation and liberalisation programmes fostered by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s (Konings 2011, Amin and Takougang 2018); a phenomenon that also affected many other countries in Africa and elsewhere. The end of the Cold War in Cameroon was marked by a global fall in commodity prices, the introduction of multipartyism and currency devaluation in 1994. This led to mass protests which saw political violence and curfew in response, particularly in urban areas known as *villes mortes.* Worsening youth employment led to youth riots in 2008 and university riots in 2005–2006 (Amin 2012, Nyamnjoh, Nkwi and Konings 2012), both of which were quickly extinguished by counterterrorism security forces (*Bataillon d'intervention rapide* or BIR). Further dissent was quashed using the recent counterterrorism law (2016) which criminalised protest. As such, youth and their concerns have been made brutally invisible again while threats of security linked to public space enhanced the conviction of young women and men that perhaps it was safer to be "stuck in the compound" (Hansen 2005) while in "waithood" (Honwana 2012).[4] Aware that stakes in protests were high, and that there is no work *(il n'y a pas de travail)*, disillusioned with the idea that they could make themselves economically visible through education or employment, young women found alternative ways in which to manifest their industriousness. Like their male counterparts, young Cameroonian women developed creative ways and forms of living to experience adulthood in perilous circumstances (Jua 2003, Simone 2005, Konings 2006, Fokwang 2006, Fuh 2009, Kovacs 2018).

Apart from their participation in the global predicament of waithood, among Bamiléké young women specifically are considered social juniors before marriage. In Bamiléké hierarchical chiefdom structures, being a social junior excludes one from certain forms of social and economic activity (Warnier 2007), such as membership in savings and credit rotating associations that provide economic stability, social security and moral and emotional assistance.[5] Such activities are usually restricted to married women, or women in "stable relationships" (i.e. in so-called *viens, on reste* unions). Cameroon's economic and political

4. For the history of the involvement of Grassfields women in protests and rebellions prior to independence see Terretta 2013, 2007 and Mougoué 2018.
5. In urban contexts associations for youth do exist, and include those based in the *quartier* or at the university as well as junior branches of village associations. However, these have different purposes to savings and rotating credit associations.

predicaments have made it harder for young women to enter into marriage and/or to sustain it: marriage rates have constantly declined since the 1980s (Johnson-Hanks 2007, Goheen 1996), not least because of how economic crises have compromised economic opportunities for men and bridewealth payments.[6] Although the social and cultural context challenges the marriage union itself (chapter 5), its allure persists, given the importance of the institution to the transition to social adulthood. From this follows a part of young Bamiléké women's predicament: associations are crucial to start an economic activity: for example, one can borrow substantial amounts of money to buy a sewing machine, start trading clothes or learn accounting. But, to access associations, young women need to be in a relationship with men. This both enhances their economic predicament and encourages them to search for other economic means.

The second axis of social (in)visibility has to do with gender. This axis manifests itself in the changes around the economic position of women and the importance of the institution of marriage. Colonial and postcolonial state structures have reshuffled the political and economic spheres and thus notions of public and private (Goheen 1996). The French colonial law in Cameroon (1914–1960), which was devised by colonial officers, local elites and church officials, legislated marriage for women in terms close to slavery (Walker-Said 2015). Under colonial law, marriage was conceived in terms of Christian norms of a nuclear family, which conflicted with marriage norms in the chiefdoms, where extended, sometimes polygamous, families were involved in sets of exchange relationships. This created tensions and ambivalences that, as we shall see, inform young women's marriage ideals and practices today (chapter 5). Moreover, the colonial and patriarchal state largely deprived woman of the possibility of employment in state structures, plantations and enterprises (Konings 2005). It removed their decision-making power from agriculture, which had been and continues to be women's privileged sphere in rural areas, both in cultivation and in marketing the crops (den Ouden 1987, Goheen 1996, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999). Thereby the ideologies of gender complementarity which had previously existed were reconfigured (Kaberry 1952, Goheen 1996). Women's roles were now imagined in the Western image of the Christian wife, to be confined to the newly constituted sphere of the home (Walker-Said 2015), to become invisible behind their husbands and children. This social engineering of female invisibility haunts

6. Bridewealth payments fall on the husband and his kin. These typically involve items enumerated by the bride's kin, most often including cattle, palm wine, textiles, kitchen utensils and cash. In total, these can range from 100,000 FCFA (150 euros or USD 180) to as much as 10,000,000 FCFA (15,000,000 euros or USD 18,000,000). These are of course not the only factors informing the decline of marriage (see chapter 5 and conclusion).

women today: a decorative wooden tablet found in the parlours of many Bamiléké homes reminds them: *la femme, c'est son foyer, son mari et ses enfants*. Thus, church and state alike framed the role of women in terms of the private space of the home and equated womanhood with the reproductive role (chapter 2). A respectable woman was framed as a married mother of many children, at the expense of her economic role, which Bamiléké chiefdoms had promoted.[7]

The axes of gender and youth converge in young Bamiléké women, as being a female and a social junior implies one is often made (in)visible in public spaces. This means, for example, that during the evening gala held as part of marriage celebrations, unmarried women will prepare food and clean dishes in the back of the venue and are rarely seen. They are last to be given food and drink at annual family gatherings in villages. If they begin employment and undergo training, they are often given the most daunting and burdensome tasks such as being constantly sent for errands, and are thus effectively removed from the office space (of course, young women can also seize this as an opportunity). They are asked to stay at home and made invisible in public spaces in order to cook (*préparer*), to mind younger siblings and to clean the house. This is linked in particular to ideas about gendered spaces and colonial and Christian notions of respectability: in order to be seen as respectable, young women should not be seen *n'importe où* (wherever) and they should not be *marcher n'importe comment* e.g. walking alone in a sexy dress at night and in certain *quartiers* of the city such as those known as *carrefour de la joie*, connoting sexual promiscuity (Ndjio 2005). If the young women I worked with ventured outside the home for example dressed in sexy styles, there was reputational risk involved, both for themselves and for their kin. Thus, young women often moved within defined spaces where they were surveilled by elders and kin, as Bene was at the market by her mother's friend in the vignette above.

The third axis is of ethnicity, whereby Bamiléké are perceived as, and feel to be, marginalised within Cameroon. The instrumentalisation of ethnic categories in political discourses and ethnic segregation policies date back to the onset of colonisation and the introduction of capitalist markets (Geschiere and Jackson 2006, Nkwi and Socpa 1999). The first capitalist companies were established on the coast during the German protectorate (1884–1918) and

7. This is not to say that a stress on reproduction is solely an outcome of the influence of church and state, for it is also valued in village ideologies and chiefdom structures. Rather this aims to highlight how reproduction is essentialised at the expense of the economic role of women by the church and state, and how marriage has become such an important institution for women.

Grassfields served as an important labour source (Konings 1996). Workers in those companies were categorised along ethnic lines (Geschiere and Jackson 2006, Konings 2008a). This paved the way for a perception of the self and others in ethnic terms. Industriousness had long been necessary for social juniors to advance in the hierarchical Bamiléké chiefdoms (Warnier 1993, de Ouden 1987), and in the new colonial plantations many Grassfielders were perceived to outdo others, which stirred up negative sentiments towards them.[8] Around the time of independence in the 1960s, the part of Grassfields around Mbouda was a centre of a violent civil war popularly known as the période *de troubles* and/or *maquis* (1958–1972) (Deltome, Tsatsita et al 2011, Konings 2008b), and many Bamiléké fled to cities in search for safety, only to encounter administrative and other barriers.[9]

During this time, the instrumentalisation of ethnic categories in Cameroon was further invigorated by a series of so-called "regional equilibrium policies" which introduced ethnic quotas in all domains administratively governed by the state (Nyamnjoh 1999, Monga 2000). Until the devaluation of the currency, the FCFA (*Franc de coopération financière en Afrique centrale*) in 1994, administrative jobs guaranteed employment stability and a reasonable salary, highly coveted by all ethnic groups. Many of my interlocutors interpreted the ethnic quotas—which existed then, as now—as explicit barriers imposed by President Paul Biya, in power since 1982, to favour his own Beti ethnic group. To be sure, many Bamiléké practice their own internal ethnic favouritism but a prejudice against the "jews of Cameroon" (Socpa 2006) is alive and well today, especially as the discourses of ethnicity are dressed anew through a rhetoric of belonging, autochthony and allochthony (Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2002, Ceuppens and Geschiere 2006, Geschiere and Jackson 2005). *Ici on n'est pas chez nous* young women and their kin would often conclude after they experienced forms of ethnic stigmatisation in Yaoundé—ranging from verbal insults in taxis, at the market to exclusion from competition at school—and would interpret these in terms of threats to their own success, exceptional industriousness and economic skill.

Taken together, the three axes—youth, gender and ethnicity—while overlapping and used here for heuristic purposes, feed into the normative discourses that framed young women's senses of self in certain ways, in particular through production (employment, work, industriousness)

8. These led to, for example, such incidents as the burning down of Bamiléké market stalls in Nkongsamba and Douala in the 1920s.
9. Political discourse in Cameroon, which conflates the Bamiléké ethnicity and the so-called *période de troubles* due to their overlapping geographical areas, has reinforced this stigma.

and reproduction (marriage and children). But even if these were desired, they were not immediately available to all.

Before moving on to the conceptual premises of this thesis, I will first describe the particular group of young women on which it focuses. Whereas youth is less defined by age than by social and economic status in Africa (Durham 2000, 2004) the majority of these young women were aged between 18 and 35 at the time of my fieldwork in 2015–2016. They were not married, nor (with one exception) did they have children, although this later changed (see conclusion).[10] All were either enrolled in university or recent university graduates. None was born in her "village of origin", i.e. the village where her father were born,[11] the chiefdoms of Batcham, Babajou or Bamissengue, situated around Mbouda in the Western Region of Cameroon (figure 2). Instead they were born in towns and cities in other parts of Cameroon (within and outside the Grassfields) where their parents moved for work or were moved by their administrative jobs; indeed, some of the young women were born in Yaoundé. Nevertheless, village of origin remained an important aspect of how these women constructed their identity, articulating a Cameroonian "politics of belonging" (Geschiere and Jackson 2006). Although the social and economic status of their parents varied, many of these young women could be described as belonging to the aspirational lower-middle class—their parents were often engaged in medium-sized trade or commerce or held teaching positions and lower administrative positions in state structures.[12]

10. Among Bamiléké having a first child outside marriage can at times help in finding a suitable marriage partner for it dispels the fear of an "empty womb" i.e. infertility (cf. Feldman-Savelsberg 1999).
11. Whereas the majority of young women traced their origin to their fathers' villages, some traced it both to their paternal and maternal village, with the latter converging with status: the higher the status of the mother, the greater the likelihood that both would be identified as villages of origin. In local parlance, this meant a young women was *doublement cotisée*, and raised her value on the marriage market.
12. Recent scholarship discusses the ongoing difficulties of using the concept of class in West African settings, highlighting, amongst others, the persistence of vertical allegiances, kin and patronage networks (Scharrer, O'Kane, Kroeker 2018, Spronk 2018).

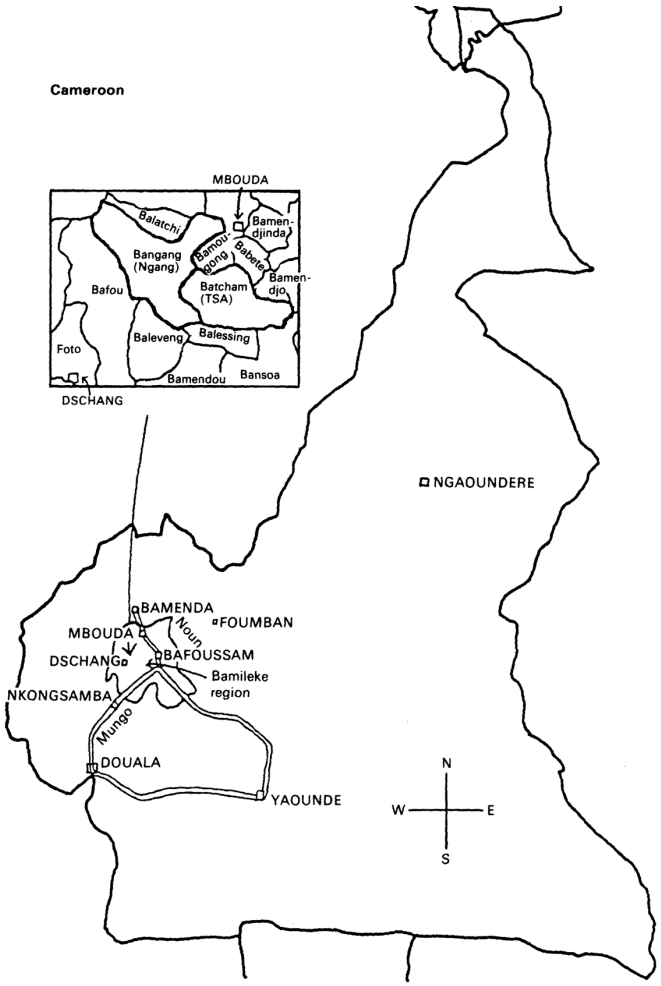


Figure 2. Map of Cameroon showing the Bamiléké region (corresponding to the Grassfields) and its constituents. Source: den Ouden (1987)

Significantly, all of their parents were connected to people in important positions in the chiefdom or held such positions themselves, and all the young women held in high regard their villages of origin, chiefs and "tradition". It is this orientation towards both "the foreign" and "the traditional" that, I suggest, differentiates them from the Cameroonian urban woman called *yoyettes* that Johnson-Hanks described as oriented away from the traditional (2007). Thus, for example, young women found it important to ensure their first "salary" was "given back" to their kin (a common practice among Bamiléké), and spoke of a desire to contribute to the construction of their family (second) homes in the village, or contributing to their village's "development". Furthermore, young Bamiléké women considered themselves Catholic but did not attend church services regularly, and none belonged to Pentecostal churches. Young women often looked down on Pentecostal churches for encouraging, even requiring, their followers to part with tradition, and for their iconoclasm, which included a rejection of the

Bamiléké cult of skulls. Given the particular connections between Cameroonian elites, high status and the Catholic Church (Konings 2007), these young women's claims reveal their aspirations to upward social mobility. Finally, they referred to themselves, and were referred to by others, as *filles androides*, highlighting how indispensable android mobile phones had become in Cameroon, and for young women in particular.[13]

By developing this specific category of young women—*filles androides*—this thesis, while not concerned with the scholarship on youth per se, nevertheless contributes to the scholarship on youth in Cameroon in particular (Jua 2003, Simone 2005, Konings 2006, Argenti 2007, Fokwang 2008, Fuh 2009), and West Africa in general (e.g. Chistiansen, Utas, Vigh 2006, deBoeck and Honwana 2005), which is predominantly concerned with young men (for exceptions see e.g. Gilbert 2014). It does so by conceptualising them not only as agents of rupture in crisis but as agents in the everyday, who simultaneously fashion continuity and change through their engagements with consumption (Fuh 2009, Gilbert 2014, 2018). In doing so young women's actions articulate the category of youth as a social shifter (Durham 2004), drawing out how meanings of youthfulness are underpinned by competences and skills (see also Cooper 2018). Furthermore, in highlighting skills and industriousness that are manifested through beauty work, this thesis contributes to a conceptualisation of social adulthood. It does so by framing social adulthood beyond debates of liminal or illimal state (e.g. Johnson-Hanks 2006, Fokwang 2008, Fuh 2009) and status. Rather, social adulthood emerges throughout the thesis as underpinned by a requirement to build up certain skills, competences and knowledge (Fokwang 2008). Social adulthood, in other words, emerges throughout the thesis, not as a state or status but as attaining certain personal qualities, skills, competences and "specialisations" that is appreciated, recognised and valued by young women, their peers and kin alike.

Fashioning visual selves

It is against the backdrop described above that young Bamiléké women tried to make themselves visible, leading us to ask what means were available to them to do so. As this thesis shows, young women often fashioned themselves and their social relations through

13. At times, this designation had negative connotations in the popular imagination. This was illustrated, for example in a presidential address on Youth Day in 2015 and certain representations in popular culture e.g. a local video production entitled *Filles Androides* (2018). Such representations often portrayed young women as desiring to gain money without effort and to cheat men for that purpose.

consumption, display and exchange of beauty, dress, and photographs. In order to understand what this involves, I lay out below the conceptual premises of this thesis. Where studies on consumption in Africa approach "imitation" underpinning self-fashioning as semiotic knowledge (e.g. Weiss 1999, Friedman 1994, Gondola 1999, Newell 2012, cf. Fuh 2009), rather than taking such notions for granted, this thesis asks what understandings of "imitation" emerge through young women's investments in fashion and photographs as they copy and imitate foreign and local celebrities and each other.[14] I conceptualise visual self-fashioning as a broader practice than consumption: display and exchange extend consumption, and are domains through which selves are fashioned and which fashion selves. Moving beyond dominant approaches to consumption in semiotic terms (Weiss 1999, Friedman 1994, Gondola 1989, Newell 2012, Ferguson 2006, Cole 2006, cf. Fuh 2009), this thesis examines imitation and visual self-fashioning in terms of visual skills and embodied knowledge (Csordas 1990, Jackson 1989, Stoller 1989, Taussig 1992, Ferguson 1999) underpinned by notions of personhood (Guyer an Belinga 1995, Guyer 1993, 1996 Nyamnjoh 2002, Rowlands 1994).

Much of the Africanist literature analyses self-fashioning as coterminous with consumption and, in semiotic terms, linked to globalisation and neoliberalism (e.g. Gandalou 1989, Gondola 1994, Friedman 1994, Weiss 2009, Newell 2012, Ferguson 2006, cf. Fuh 2009). These studies, therefore, ask what imitation represents and consider it, for example, as an index of dreams and aspirations. The self-fashioning of young women, too, was influenced by processes of neoliberal market globalisation, in particular global circulation of figures of femininity whose beautified bodies seem to promise to "magically" bring about the futures they desired (Taussig 2012, Jarrin 2017, cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2000). But, as young women crafted their own appearances to *resemble* local and international music stars and other figures, as well as each other, this thesis, in a decolonial effort, inquires into "imitation" as understood by the social actors themselves.

Moreover, many earlier Africanist studies privilege young men as social actors in the theatre of consumption. However, as Cole (2010) observes in her ethnography of youth in Tamatave, Madagascar, "the rise of consumerism made young females a particularly visible category". While contending this was also the case in Yaoundé, this thesis takes Cole's observation as its

14. These studies often gesture at the Western notion of the "modern self" as a subject made through objects implying therefore separation between the two. In doing so they occlude alternative approaches to understanding consumption, crucially those where bodies and commodities are perceived as entangled with each other as this thesis suggests.

ethnographic point of departure, inquiring into how this visibility is made (see also Nyamnjoh, Durham and Fokwang 2002). Cole (2010) examines how young women in Madagascar produce social change through the new paths for upward social mobility that emerged at the interstices of shifting economic and political conditions in Tamatave: the sexual economy and Pentecostalism. Her work (2010) is particularly helpful for this ethnographic study because she links these new paths to local conceptions of valued forms of gendered personhood that are equally relevant for the Grassfields (Rowlands 1994, Nyamnjoh 2002). She argues from a historical perspective that young women who, for example, desire new consumer goods such as dress styles, and enter the sexual economy, are motivated by entry into valued "reciprocal relationships of exchange". Although Cole (2010) uses the term "disembedding", which might lead us to think of radical ruptures in social relations and between generations, her ethnography actually shows how young women elaborate new ways of inhabiting older norms transforming them in the process.

This thesis develops the insights of Cole (2010) and others, especially scholars of the Grassfields (Rowlands 1994, Nyamnjoh 2002), about importance of notions of (gendered) personhood and exchange in order to understand investments in consumption among young Bamiléké women in urban contexts. Cole's (2010) observations also hold for the young women this thesis describes: for example, when dressing in certain ways, young women in Yaoundé, like their Malagasy counterparts, negotiated politics of reputation (chapter 2). To be sure, scholars have shown how female consumption of fashion, as exemplified by the figure of the "modern girl" taking forms from "the respectable" to "the wicked" has been often tied, in representations and in practice, with (embracing or rejecting) eroticism and investments in sexual economies (e.g. Weinbaum et al 2008, White 1999, Burke 1994). But young women in Yaoundé who navigated fashion to distinguish themselves from the category of "prostitute" also invited alternative evaluations as their fashion enterprises were appreciated by kin and peers alike. By detailing how young Bamiléké women did this, this thesis aims to moves beyond the dominant lens of enquiry that the rise of consumer culture has entailed for young women, i.e. of engagement in sexual economies (e.g Cole 2010, Nyjamjoh 2005, 2011, Groes-Green 2011). Instead I ask what other effects the rise of consumer cultures under neoliberalism had for young Cameroonian women in particular (cf. Nyamnjoh 2005, 2011); a rise, which, to be sure, was enabled by an influx of accessible Chinese commodities such makeup kits, hair extensions, textiles and, crucially, android phones with cameras. China, as young women said to me: "allows everyone to be beautiful at least for one day".

Young women's investments in consumption, such as wearing sexy to resemble Beyoncé, could be appreciated by others. This is because dressing well—knowing which models to imitate, how to stitch and match them, how to innovate with them (*changer un peu*) and how to wear them (Ferguson 1999, Sylvanus 2016), and where—was considered a desired visual skill or "fashion competence" (Hansen 2013). That is, "fashion competence" was not considered to represent young women's dreams or aspiration but was a form of embodied knowledge that kin could also be proud of and invest in, and their female peers could be jealous of it. A young woman who excelled could become a fashionista, gather followers and reverse social hierarchies (chapters 2 and 3). Similarly, posing could be congratulated as a particular bodily technique (Mauss, 1973 [1935]), and lack of facility in it could be laughed at (chapter 4). It could be learnt from Beyoncé or from one another in order to claim presence and enhance one's visibility during an event that, in turn, could "open up a chance" of upward social mobility (chapter 3). Furthermore, photographs of garments and poses could be taken at a photographic studio or with one's android phone, copied and circulated among kin and peers in printed or digital form. In doing so, young women embedded themselves into relations with others.

This understanding of consumption is echoed in how the consumption of visual images was evaluated. Consider a male interlocutor's response when I showed him a photograph of a young woman in a pose resembling the Cameroonian singer Charlotte Dipanda (chapter 3): "she imitates well! … she is fashion! she had to go a long way in order to get these clothes and photographs if she is poor like that; she must know where to go, who to ask, how to get things from them … such a woman works well". Here we might again question the appropriateness of semiotic approaches to account for an explicit claim such as "she imitates well" and instead note that imitation is embodied knowledge, a "performative capacity" (Ferguson 1999) conceived as a skill for crafting surfaces (cf. Newell 2012). But that male interlocutor not only conceived of consumption and imitation as skills or competences; he valued the object in terms of young women's skill to get by amidst the challenging conditions of the post-Cold war Cameroon (Tonda 2005). For young women living in precarious conditions, consumption entailed production (cf. Newell 2012): their flamboyant dress styles, their makeup and the photographs they made and edited were often evaluated in terms of their visual skills which in turn spoke of their industriousness. In other words, they represented how young women who lacked economic resources navigated their social and economic networks to obtain these goods in the first place. Indeed, as we will see, young women helped seamstresses to have their own

dresses made and learned how to edit images on their own. “Skill” here is knowing what is currently fashionable, knowing how to get it, and knowing how to wear and display it (cf. Newell 2012).

Yet the ways in which young women learnt skills and obtained garments, or the venues in which they appeared on the images, was also the subject of vigilant inspection by themselves and by others. Young women had to go a “long way” in order to depict themselves in terms of skills and industriousness. This points to questions of the morality of accumulation (Englund 2001, cf. Geschiere and Fisiy 1994): from where and how garments were obtained given their status as social juniors and their economic predicaments. Thus, consumption spoke to moral forms of personhood (Rowlands 1994, Nyamnjoh 2002, Englund 2001). As young women put on “too much” makeup (chapter 1) or updated their fashionable digital photographic display “too often” (chapter 5) the ways in which material resources were obtained might allude not only to lack of sharing (i.e. making one’s personal achievement benefit others) and socially-repudiated retention (Ndjio 2008), but to involvement in the sexual economy, sectarian networks of wealthy men, and witchcraft (Geschiere 2013). Recalling Cole’s ethnography (2010) such allegations imply that making oneself visible through consumption was also fraught with the risk of losing respectability; for being publicly called a “prostitute” or being accused of “having eaten on one’s own” (i.e. not having shared) could make people turn away and close up the possibility of upward social mobility. Thus, young women constantly negotiated “sexuality” and “respectability” not, as Cole argues (ibid.), as two separate strategies for reaching their goals at different stages in their lives, but as conflicting aspects of the same strategy for upward social mobility in one embodied act of consumption or self-fashioning (Gilbert 2014).

To understand how young women could embed themselves into relations with others through exchange we must look closer into how imitation as embodied knowledge works. To this end, in this thesis I conceptualise young women’s imitation or self-fashioning as “beauty work” (cf. Miller 1987 cf. Foster 2008). In doing so I echo Miller (1987) and Foster’s (2008) notions of “consumption work” but approach it differently, in terms of embodiment. By beauty work I mean the work necessary to produce beauty and the work that beauty does. Beauty is understood as aesthetics—a material discourse of the body operating in sensory ways (cf. Edmonds 2010, Yang 2011, Alvaro 2017). Beauty work therefore includes both embodied and visual skills, such as creating a dress and wearing it in a particular way (chapter 2 and 3),

learning to walk, doing a *poster*—posing in a manner resembling a star or a model (chapter 4), and editing a photograph of oneself (chapter 5). The material qualities of objects mediate young women's bodies in certain ways (e.g. creating resemblance to a star) which in turn engages sensory captivation: enchantment or allure as a structure of feelings (Williams 1977, Thrift 2008). This is evoked, for example, through evaluations of how much makeup is used (chapter 1), how tight a dress style is (chapter 2 and 3), the sheen and magnitude of photographs (chapter 5), or the contrast and brightness in crafting a visual appearance which, as Bene described it, "hits the eye" (*bien marier pour frapper*). The ways in which beauty work achieves this is reminiscent, I suggest, of Gell's "technologies of enchantment" (1988): skills are embedded in the material production of aesthetics forms such as dress and photographs and implicate the sensorium and achieve desired effects through performance (Austin 1975 [1962], cf. Miller 1995, chapter 2).

In other words, I suggest that beauty work produced particular sensory effects through which young women were able to seduce others, whether kin or peers, and in doing created paths of distribution and embedded themselves into relations with others. As young women resembled celebrities and stars through their poses, manners and looks, the resemblances and likenesses produced in these performances—emerging from learnt bodily knowledge and calculated visual skills—generated visual pleasure and invited imaginary explorations that held the self and others in a sensory grip (Thrift 2008, cf. Tonda 2005). This quality of enchantment or allure was materially crafted and embedded in the aesthetic form: a garment or a photograph, based on visual skills. If such crafting of allure needed to first be activated through a performance (Austin 1975 [1962]), it was then extended as photographs of dresses were further circulated, often using android phones (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1937]). These relations of exchange tuned the senses and created certain affective states (Ahmed 2004) which accounted for young women's embedding in relations. When young women's resemblances made themselves and others *feel* in certain ways, this accounted for their persuasive power: their male peers desired them, their female peer wanted to befriend and copy them or were jealous, and the young women themselves, and their kin, felt hopeful about the future.

In arguing that young women's investments in self-fashioning should be understood in terms of their skills, innovations and embodied knowledge this thesis builds also on arguments of the *longue durée* made for the region. In particular I draw on Guyer's argument that people are valued in terms of their skills, inventions and knowledge (1995, 1996 see also Johnson-Hanks

2005, 2017) and, more, that persons are valued more than things. Or, rather, in the contemporary Cameroonian context, persons are valued "in addition to" things, illuminating why, for example, young women who searched, laboriously and for a long time, for a "unique style" would, on finding it, readily distribute it to others (1995, 1996). In doing so, they converted things, skills and knowledge into reputation (as a fashionista) and accumulated "wealth in followers" and "wealth in men" through the circulation of objects (chapter 3, Munn 1986). Through distribution they established their own networks around shared "aesthetic sensibilities" (Meyer 2010) or bought into those of others (chapter 3). This in turn enabled them to earn the respect they sought (chapter 3), open paths to upward mobility and increase their "wealth in prospects" (Johnson-Hanks 2017), which could bring more tangible benefits (chapter 2, 3 and 5).

Furthermore, in arguing that the dynamics of beauty work involve a form of distribution that speaks to "reciprocal relations of exchange" and thereby to moral forms of personhood, I build on notions of personhood and agency advanced for the Grassfields region. In the Grassfields, Nyamnjoh (2002) argues, agency implies sharing and establishing interdependence as a way of "domestication" and of maximising opportunities (Fokwang 2008, cf. Jua 2003). Bamiléké hierarchical chiefdoms privilege personal agency, industriousness and entrepreneurship as paths for upward social mobility (Warnier 1993, den Ouden 1987). In this thesis, young women distribute beauty products (chapter 1), dress and photo styles (chapter 2) as well as images and poses to others (chapter 3, 4 and 5) to create "openings" for upward social mobility and for getting out of "waithood" by accumulating "wealth in prospects" (Johnson-Hanks 2017). As such they become interconnected with others which, as Nyamnjoh (2002) notes, facilitates social visibility; or they extend themselves, their reputations and relations through feelings generated by objects (cf. Munn 1986). Thus, young women's beauty work is better understood as an intersubjective practice (Nyamnjoh 2002). Sharing and distributing garments or their images using android phones—that is, engaging in reciprocal relations of exchange—allowed young women to reveal themselves as moral and to dispel certain reputational risks: they operated in a social environment wherein for personal achievement to count at all, it had to have benefits for others (Nyjamjoh 2002, Warnier 1993). Thus, this thesis highlights the ongoing importance of reciprocal relations of exchange within consumer cultures fuelled by globalisation and neoliberalism (Fokwang 2008, cf. Jua 2003) albeit underpinned by an "economy of desire" (Piot 1999, 1991).

As such, this thesis offers an understudied perspective on women—young women in particular—in anthropological scholarship in West Africa, which generally tends to discuss women in relation to agricultural production (e.g. Goheen 1996), reproduction (e.g. Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Johnson-Hanks 2006) or religion (e.g. Gilbert 2014). Moving beyond the anthropological discussions that frame the impact of consumer cultures on young women in Africa in terms of sexual economies (e.g. Cole 2005, Nyamnjoh 2005), I highlight other effects of such consumer cultures under neoliberalism (e.g. Weinbaum et al 2008, Thomas 2005). Consumption is widely used as a lens to look at masculinity and men (e.g. Weiss 1999, Newell 2012, Gondola 1999, Gandalou 1989, Friedman 1994, cf. Fuh 2008) and is often analysed only in semiotic terms. Such analysis by not recognising imitation as embodied knowledge implies, wittingly or unwittingly, a separation between mind and body.

By analysing young women's visual self-fashioning as a form of beauty work, i.e. as embodied knowledge, skills and practices that generate sensory effects, this thesis aims also to bring a new analytical perspective to Africanist and anthropological scholarship on market capitalism wherein commodity consumption in its embodied dimension is seen as intimately tied with the work on and of the senses and to notions of personhood (Jackson and Karp 1989). In much of the existing African anthropological literature sex, agricultural production and reproduction are often related to women, nature and to the local, while consumption is related to men, the global and to culture. As such we may criticise this scholarship for reproducing the binaries, not only of "female:male as nature:culture" (Ortner 1972), but also "local:global as feminine:masculine" (Freeman 2011). In an effort to break with these binaries, this thesis complicates understandings of the influence of consumer cultures on young women's position (or predicament), showing how beauty, fashion and photographs provide those in precarious economic, social and political conditions the means to alter relations across gender and generation, and to fashion paths of upward mobility.

Female subjectivities

Many of the self-fashioning practices described in this thesis are framed in popular discourses as feminine. Visual fashioning of femininity is embedded in popular Cameroonian discourses such as: "it is women who do *nyanga*" and "women should be pleasurable to see"; or "beauty

is female duty". Such discourses invite understandings of beauty work as fostering objectifications and commodifications of the female body for the male gaze, echoing similar discourses present in Cameroonian popular culture (Fuh nd.). In order to understand such claims in the Cameroonian context, this thesis asks: how are bodies made female through beauty work in the first place?

In discussing how visual fashioning makes bodies female, I build on Judith Butler's notion of gender performativity. In her seminal work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler draws on Austin's theory of performative acts to argue: "gender is the repeated stylisation of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly ridged regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (1990:33). She elaborates this in *Bodies that Matter*, explaining: "performativity is not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or a set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition" (1993:xxi). For Butler, the body is not prior to the sign, but rather the "body signified as prior to signification is an effect of signification" (1993:6) and the gendered subject emerges through a repetitive citational practice of the norm, a process of sedimentation which she calls materialisation.

Butler, following Foucault's understanding of power as productive, posits such norms not as disabling but enabling. What follows is a paradox of subjectification: "the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced by such norms", and each reiteration, according to Butler contains (1990), a disruptive potential to unsettle or question the norm. From this perspective beauty work sediments or materialises "aesthetic subjectivities"—that is, subjectivities produced through material forms in sensory ways—through repeated acts of stylisation as young women apply make-up (chapter 1), dress in fashionable styles (chapter 2 and 3), and pose in front of the camera (chapter 4), and edit and circulate their photographs (chapter 5). However, the same practices—for example, editing the layers of an image to make oneself look good and garner attention—are a set of visual skills and embodied knowledge—recall the praise of a male interlocutor, "she imitates well"–and can be appreciated as craft. Therefore, I suggest, the effacement, concealment or dissimulation necessary for the effectiveness of gender performativity does not take place; instead, performance is recognised as such. This is because each reiteration of a performative act is conceived of in terms of embodied knowledge and visual skills (cf. Ferguson 1999).

From this perspective, I suggest, we might critique Butler's theory, despite its insistence on materialisation, not only as rooted in a logocentric notion of the body (Ahmed 2014) but also in a semiotic understanding of imitation, and thus of performance. In this thesis, it is not certain bodily features or aspects of appearance that are deemed female. Rather, female aesthetic subjectivity is formed through beauty work as a skill for crafting surfaces. For this reason, beauty is valued not as a particularly feminine feature, as an inner sense for the beautiful, but rather as a competence, a task, or indeed as work, which cannot be conceived of in terms of deception (cf. Newell 2012) but can be apprehended in terms of a more or less successful, better or worse effort of improvement, which is at times exhausting in itself (chapter 5). Neither the reiterations of performative acts that beauty work entails, nor the alluring effects it aims to produce, unsettle gender norms that invite objectifications of female bodies. Rather, when reiterations are appreciated they reveal an active and, indeed, skilful constitution of young women's objectifications and, by extension, pointing out how gender is made. [15]

However, as young women manifest their skills through beauty, this reveals them as industrious. While female consumption is frowned upon (Cole 2010) and tends to reduce female productive capacities to reproduction and care for the household, industriousness, African feminists argue, has been a valued feminine feature across this region (Amadiume 1987, Oyewumi 1999). Industriousness (entrepreneurialism), individualism and competition are valued as paths to upward social mobility in Bamiléké hierarchical chiefdoms (Warnier 1993, den Ouden 1987) and thus to valued forms of social adulthood. Insofar as young women manifest their industriousness through beauty work, they unsettle church and state discourses that frame women as passive subjects and incline to make invisible in other ways than reproduction (chapter 2). When young women's economic potential is read through their beauty by young men, it shows that the economic role of women continues to be valued despite an economic and political environment that provides few opportunities to be proved so. Also parents who see young women industriously searching for fashion and performing multiple fashionable displays are reassured that young women are on their way to attain social adulthood. Thus, on the one hand, young women's self-fashioning with its manifestations of skills and industriousness can challenge patriarchal relations governing market, church and state. But, on the other, industriousness allows young women not only to manifest their

15. African feminists have questioned the appropriateness of Western notions of gender as rooted in the body, highlighting instead how gender emerges through particular configurations of relationships in particular social contexts (Amadioume 1987, Oyewumi 1997) and through engagement with objects (e.g. Ferme 2006).

economic potential but also their marriageability revealing that, through beauty work, young women equally aim to buy into those structures, albeit reconfiguring their own roles within in the process.

This thesis discusses how young women actively choose to objectify and commodify their bodies, and how such practices are viewed as skills that reveal industriousness, thus questioning notions of empowerment, submission and resistance as adequate for the analysis of beauty work (Mahmood 2005). Feminist anthropologists have questioned the appropriateness of Western notions of gender (in)equality in other cultural contexts (e.g. Mahmood 2005, Strathern 2004, Abu-Lughod 1990, Alvaro 2018). As Mahmood argues, to account for a lack of disruptive potential in reiteration of a norm we should contend with bodies not as signs but as a medium (2005); this thesis aims to do so by highlighting how bodies are mediated through beauty, dresses and photographs. Furthermore, in the Cameroonian context in particular, scholars have highlighted how notions of gender complementarity indicate emic conceptions of power (Kaberry 1952, Diduk 1989, Goheen 1996). Therefore, visual self-fashioning with its potentially unsettling power (i.e. revealing female industriousness through beauty work and its allure) is not an act of resistance to objectification or commodification of female bodies, as much as performativity theory may indicate (Morris 1995). Nor do young women think about their self-fashioning practices in these terms.

In defying binaries of resistance or reinforcement, the skilful crafting of female self-objectification equally complicates feminist critiques of the commodification of female body under capitalist modernity (e.g. Felski 1995). Such skilful crafting for display articulates what Benjamin calls the "display value of commodity" (in Buck-Morss 1991, cf. Haug 1987). Indeed, as we will see, young women learn how to draw (immaterial or affective) value from the display of their (sexualised) bodies, for example through posing during photographic sessions at the studio. These sessions, at times, resemble shots for product advertising. It is here that we might recall from the opening vignette that the way Bene aesthetically arranged the garment display in her mother's stall was not that different from arranging the aesthetics of one's own appearance, in particular hair. Feminist scholarship has recognised how the female body, and concomitantly femininity, is reduced to a commodity through the ways in which it is used in advertising and more generally key for accumulation on capitalist and neoliberal markets (e.g. Felski 1995, Irigaray 1997, Frederici 2014 [1998]). Beauty ideals and practices are argued to reflect the patriarchal ideologies and social inequalities that are the means of

social control of the female body (e.g. Bordo 2013 [1993], Faludi 1992, Wolf 1991). Whereas these approaches are helpful in illuminating the gendered power relations involved in the construction of beauty as ideal and as practice, and partially reflect the patriarchal realities of young woman, this thesis, together with more recent feminist work, asks: "is there a place in feminist thought for what we might call a positive aesthetic, an affirmation, however conditional, of the value of beauty and aesthetic pleasure?" (Felski 2006:273) (chapter 3). I suggest that to see this self-objectification as a positive aesthetic entails acknowledging that aesthetic labour is beauty work (Arendt 1958)—a form of skill that allows young women to craft their own bodies and feel pleasure for themselves, and which is not reducible to patriarchal regimes of recognition.

Then, following Morris: "when recognising the lack of resistance in performance, we may also be forced to consider some of the more coercive structures in operation, the structures that mitigate against voluntarist forms of performative self-constitution" (1995:589). As some Africanist anthropologists have noted (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Piot 2010), in late capitalism the promise of advancement through economic means is a precarious one, leading some to put faith in noneconomic means. By engaging their visual skills to craft their bodies to resemble the "figures of beauty" circulating in, for example, Brazilian telenovelas, French fashion shows, American music videos and Miss Cameroon contests, young women partly reiterate this neoliberal dream which promises that investments in body and beauty will "magically" bring about the futures they desire (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Piot 2010 Hage 2003): marrying into a wealthier family, becoming a star, achieving fame and fortune or getting a job. Yet, more than a promise of social ascent, beauty becomes a means of actual social advancement for the young women this thesis describes, not because it represents "abundance without effort" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000) but conversely because it is a form of work that produces "magical" effects (Thrift 2008, Gell 1988).

For many women living in economic precarity, who are disillusioned with formal paths such as education and formal employment as a means to attaining a better future, this thesis suggests the production of allure—the "magical" effects of beauty—becomes work in itself. Indeed, beauty work makes constant demands for self-improvement on young women to craft alluring surfaces (cf. Dosekun 2017). This, in turn, is particularly accentuated by a heightened attention to surfaces through new visual media and android phones which function as mirrors, as well as their cameras which enable self-surveillance (cf. Bernault 2005, cf. Tonda 2005). As beauty

work becomes a crucial means of upward social mobility, including altering one's reputation, being treated with respect, finding a suitable husband and sustaining oneself through relationships with others in economic and affective ways, the fact that this is also a form of work and requires one to constantly update skills, remain vigilant for competitors and monitor the self—indeed, demanding one be industrious and entrepreneurial—reveals how the production of immaterial value (allure or magic) has become particularly taxing female work (chapter 5).

Here, we might note how young women's practices mirror larger economic processes through which value is created under late capitalism (cf. Edmonds 2010, Jarrin 2017, Taussig 2012). Efforts to elicit sensory responses through allure resonate with scholarship that argues that immaterial value and affect embedded in the aesthetic form are key to the functioning of economies aimed at generating passionate interests and emotions, pointing towards feminist theorisations that posit emotions, affects, feelings and sensations as central to the processes of commodification, accumulation and by extension to functioning of "aesthetic capitalism" i.e. the aestheticisation of economic life (Illouz 2017, 2007, Berlant 2011, Hoshschild 2003 [1983])[16]. This comes across particularly well if we consider how young women's practices resemble strategies of marketing or branding that focus on feelings and experiences to create (surplus) value (Mazarella 1995, Foster 2008, see chapter 3, cf. Munn 1986); and how doing so blurs distinctions between subjects and objects by displacing qualities between them (cf. Latour 2010) to enchant the "client": young women's peer or kin, or a friend (Gell 1988).

Seeing these processes of immaterial value creation as central to commodification and late capitalism also resonates with recent theorisations of state power in African postcolony. Insofar as young women's visual self-fashioning consists of using their bodies as objects for display to elicit sensory engagements, and the fabrication of self-fashioning is appreciated and recognised as magical and made, this thesis speaks to contemporary arguments about the commodification and fetishisation of the body as central mechanisms to operations of state power in the African postcolony (Tonda 2005, Mbembe 2001). Tonda (2005), in particular, argues that, in the contemporary moment, notions of fetishism embedded in the operations of the postcolonial African state (Mbembe 2001), late market capitalism and religion converge to

16. Although Illouz's primary conceptual term is emotional capitalism, which she develops as a more refined version of aesthetic capitalism (2007:12), I prefer to use the latter due to the importance of the visual in young women's practices this thesis describes (for other definitions see e.g. Lipovetsky and Serroy 2013).

create particular conditions of violence in which bodies are treated as things and commodities, and commodities and things as live beings—a blurring of distinctions between bodies and objects that enchantment generates—and are believed to bring about one's desires. The centrality of bodies and commodities to young women's desire to fashion upward social mobility paths echoes these processes and constitutes them as postcolonial subjects firmly embedded in operations of power. On the other hand, insofar as such processes of mirroring—or rather, from a bodily perspective, resonating—are elaborated and appreciated in terms of bodily skills, crafted surfaces and their sensory excess, visual self-fashioning is irreducible to such wider operations of power, allowing young women to transform their social positions in everyday life. Thus, this thesis argues young women's practices speak to both the constitution and the transformation of female postcolonial subjectivities (cf. Tonda 2005) (chapter 3).

In stressing the centrality of the body and materiality to the ways in which beauty work achieves sensory effects and thereby forms subjectivities, this thesis specifically builds on the work of Rowlands (1994) on the materiality of modern success in Bamenda (the part of Bamiléké Grassfields which falls in Anglophone Cameroon). I furthermore build on the work of Warnier (2007) who, drawing on Foucault's notion of subjectivation and "technologies of the self" (1988) and Mauss's "techniques of the body" (Mauss, 1973 [1935]) shows how subjectivities are formed in the Grassfields chiefdom of Mankon through what he calls, after Foucault, "technologies of power": through engagements with material culture highlighting bodily and sensory responses such engagements generate, extending them to the domain of feeling or affect. In other words, to the effects that beauty work, as a technology of enchantment and as technology of power (i.e. a form of subjectivation), generates. Where the theories of African postcolonial state power described above lack explicit theorising of subjectivation, by focusing on the body, Warnier's ideas allow us to account for how power forms the subject (2007).

By showing how beauty work shapes female aesthetic subjectivities this thesis contributes to the literature on femininity and gender in West Africa. Reiterating arguments questioning the appropriateness of liberal Western notions of gender and gender (in)equality in other cultural contexts (Mahmood 2005), I show how femininity emerges through skills for crafting surfaces; and how, in doing so, young women are both reinforcing and unsettling gender norms and relations (cf. Butler 1990, 1993, Hodgson and McCurdy 2001). Contending that the practices described here challenge such binaries, this thesis complicates feminist critiques of aesthetic labour under neoliberalism, highlighting how young women's practices defy patriarchal

regimes of recognition when considered in terms of skills for crafting surfaces, embodied knowledge and sensory effects (cf. Felski 2005). If self-fashioning as a skill for crafting surfaces resonates with global capitalist regimes of value creation (Illouz 2017, 2007), female body valuation and the workings of the postcolonial state (Tonda 2005), while constituting young women as subjectivities firmly embedded in the operations of power, beauty work, I argue, is itself not reducible to these processes for the actual transformations it simultaneously affords (cf. Tonda 2005).

Uncertainty and agency

To ask how young Bamiléké women fashion their selves is to contend with notions of agency in the postcolony. Much of the Africanist scholarship discusses material and semiotic decay across the continent (e.g. de Boeck and Plissart 2004, Mbembe 2001, Tonda 2005, cf. Newell 2012). This scholarship has sought to make sense of the wider context of neoliberalism, neoimperialism, political authoritarianism, the economic downturn and rising inequalities particularly since the end of the Cold War (Piot 2010), but which have been ongoing since at least the 1980s. This permanent state has been called one of crisis (Mbembe and Roitman 1995, Vigh 2009) and has created pervasive uncertainties, ranging from the material (lack of access to means of subsistence) to existential (grounding sense of the future in the presence). This context of crisis (Vigh 2006) raises fundamental questions about agency, i.e. how to create meaningful social acts amidst uncertain conditions.

In other words, how can young women engage in visual-self fashioning if they are aware that these actions might not bring about the outcomes they desire—not only because, as visual performative acts, these depend on the receptiveness of the audience (Austin 1975 [1962]), but also because they are aware that their previous enterprises for various reasons have failed? Moreover, if young women know that their enterprises are fraught with risks and uncertain outcomes, why extend or replicate these enterprises by, for example, copying and circulating images via android phone? How to understand young women's persistence in investing in visual self-fashioning amidst uncertainty about its outcomes?

In order to answer these questions, we are reminded of Johnson-Hanks' work on pregnancy among Beti women in Cameroon in which she argues that, rather than specifically planning when and how many offspring to have, young women rely on contingency (2002, 2005). She asserts that "under the conditions of uncertainty applicable in contemporary Africa, effective social action is based not on the fulfilment of prior intentions but on a judicious opportunism: the actor seizes promising chances" (2005:363, cf. Vigh 2006, 2009).[17] However, this formulation risks reifying agency and tends to present chance as external to the subject. It is not, I suggest, that the actor merely waits for a chance to occur, as Johnson-Hank's formulation might imply (2002). Even in a state of radicalised uncertainty, or perhaps especially in such a state, social actors may actively prepare for a promising chance and, in doing so, help produce it. This thesis attempts to account for particular ways in which a "preparation for prospection" (Guyer 2006) occurs; or how actors create "openings" as a means for "getting ready for a chance" out of waithood (Honwana 2013) and to accumulate "wealth in prospects" (Johnson-Hanks 2017). As Benjamin argues: "Games of chance have the great attraction of making people free from waiting" **(**in Buck-Morss 1991:111).

When young women engage in beauty work, this amounts to "getting ready for a chance" (*préparer ma chance*) wherein dress and photographs participate in specific forms of sociality that since long entangled them. Yet these actions can go further than merely "preparing for prospection". Because the involvement of objects with their material qualities can produce certain visual and sensory effects such as allure and enchantment, beauty work can also create an "opening" which encourages chance or even makes it happen e.g. different material qualities involved in dress and photo making—or different kinds of allure—rule out certain choices while encouraging others. Speaking in Johnson-Hanks' terms (2002) and drawing on the widely-used idiom for marriage across West Africa, young women do not wait for men to come knocking on their doors, but aim to open these doors themselves and "make men come knocking". As such the subjects of this thesis are firmly entangled in the uncertain conditions in which they are not only subjects but which they actively coproduce and seize in order to produce possibilities (Cooper and Pratten 2015, di Nunzio 2015).

Young women deal with the uncertainty inherent in their performative acts so as to increase their chances to accumulate wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). My ethnographic

17. Johnson-Hanks' theorisation of agency in uncertainty is in many ways similar to Vigh's concept of social navigation (2006, 2009). Her ideas are however more appropriate for the context I describe because of the stress she places on possibility and potentiality.

material shows that how a young woman represents herself through a photograph or dress does not often stand in an indexical or iconic relation to the self, e.g. when young women dress as married women (chapter 2) or pose as stars (chapter 3). Not only does uncertainty permeate the relationship between the representation and the self but, crucially, attempts at qualifying this relationship in terms of appearances and truths, my ethnographic material suggests, are not at stake. In other words when young women dress as wealthy women to pick up a diploma from their university, or when they pose as stars, their actions are not considered in terms of deception (cf. Newell 2012) because, as this thesis argues, they are considered forms of embodied knowledge. Rather, dress and photographs, as outcomes of skill for crafting surface are invested with rarity, uniqueness or extraordinariness to deal with the uncertainty of performative acts, articulated through the utterance of a *wow!* pointing to the beyond or unknown (cf. Meyer 2010).

Photographs and dress, therefore, operate not only as a "window onto reality" (Strassler 2010, Pinney 1997) i.e. in a "world duplicating" mode of representations, but also a "world creating" mode of skills and crafts (cf. Mbembe 2001) (chapters 2 and 4). In order to understand how this happens, we must attend to the visual means by which young women fashion their selves as well as to visual regimes in the postcolony. Much of the scholarship on dress and photography assumes and/or implies an indexical relationship between the signifier and the signified in the representation of the self, while some scholars have instead examined the relationship itself. Pointing out that this relationship defies straightforward indexical and iconic relations to the self, anthropological accounts (Pinney 1997, Strassler 2012, Poole 2005) instead foreground the ambivalence of the relationship between the photographic representation and the self. Equally, scholars of dress have pointed out the relationship of ambivalence in representations of the self. For example, Hansen notes: "the subjective and social experiences of dress are not always mutually supportive but may contradict one another, tensions between the two experiences of dress give rise to considerable ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty" (2013:2). This ambiguity, uncertainty and ambivalence is, for young women and men, "grounds for action" (di Nunzio 2015).

Why then should young women despite risks and disappointments, repeat their uncertain acts?[18] This thesis suggests that the reproduction of such acts should be understood as a way

18. This in turn begs further questions about temporality of failure. For one thing, young women who wear a dress to catch a man may try it out on different men and in different spaces, places and contexts. Moreover, young women will change their dresses a little bit each time (*un*

for young women to deal with uncertainty about their futures and maintain hope that, one day, they too will get out of waithood. That is, theirs is an active and busy waithood. In order to understand how beauty work generates hope, we might note that, when asked why young women make and edit images of themselves or elaborate new dress styles, young women repeatedly said, for entertainment (*pour se distraire)*. Indeed, enjoyment was an affect many performances generated. Entertainment, as Turner reminds us (1982, 1986), is a form of ritual that holds in-between: a liminal space and time characterised by ambiguity of meaning wherein the performer is neither what she has been nor what she will become (Turner 1982, 1986). Such ambiguous and uncertain periods are fertile grounds for hope, I suggest, because they redirect temporality of young women's embodied knowledge towards the unknown (cf. Miyazaki 2004). It is here that young women's practices echo arguments about ritual practices as being one of the principal means of articulating the anxieties about challenges of social reproduction in neoliberal age as well as a means to deal with the anxieties by allowing to envision the world remade (Weiss 2004, see chapter 4). Thus, it makes sense to reproduce these practices, and this thesis shows how android phones enable such reproduction or such everyday rituals to take place.[19]

Following Miyazaki (2004) and drawing on Bloch and Benjamin, hope as a method reorients knowledge towards "what has not yet become" and the capacity of "what has not yet become" moves the present moment forward. It is here that young women's insistence on innovation (*changer un peu)* matters. When using new makeup or creating new styles to seduce men despite previous failures (chapter 2); when displaying their new images online and circulating printed images among kin to increase matrimonial options or "wealth in prospects" (chapter 5); when updating photographs on android phones or on their walls at home (chapter 4); and when posing in imitation of local or international models and celebrities (chapter 3); young women engage bodily in anticipatory actions that re-inscribe in the present an orientation to the future (cf. Miyazaki 2004). Thus, young women do not conceive of their actions in a deterministic fashion; rather, these are outcome oriented-actions opening the possibility that a hoped-for future may occur (Elliot 2016). Hope relies here on the newness of an act of self-fashioning, for young women insist on photographing themselves "each time they have new

peu). Thus, each situation is new and if one does not succeed in obtaining a reward once, the element of novelty raises the hope for success next time. Given that these acts are open-ended, one is unlikely to experience it as a failure since one never knows when the opportunity to benefit from the investment will arise.

19. For more on the flipside of reproduction of self-fashioning, or dwelling on anticipation, see chapter 4 and the conclusion.

clothes", echoing the temporality of commodity consumption itself (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991, cf. Miyazaki 2006).

Significantly, in all these instances, hope as a "radical reorientation of temporality of knowledge" (Miyazaki 2004) to the "not yet" is reproduced and maintained, not at the level of (verbal) discourse but at the level of the body challenging the majority of the existing and somewhat disembodied scholarship on the issue (Miyazaki 2004, Zigon 2006, Bryant and Knight 2019, cf Crapanzano 2003). For example, Miyazaki suggests an opposition between bodily states and hope as a method when he argues that "hope is not an emotional state of positive feeling about the future or a religious sense of expectation; it is not even a subject of analysis" rather hope is a "method of radical temporal reorientation of knowledge" (2004: 5). This thesis suggests that, to the contrary, hope as a method is embodied. That is, it occurs as an outcome of a performance in which a dress hugs the body and the body wears a new *poster* (chapter 2 and 3), and is renewed in an act of embodied perception when looking at one's own and others' images, when updating one's photographic display on a wall, on the phone or on Facebook (chapters 4 and 5). Thus, I suggest, hope is performative and embodied. To be sure, the labour of hope can be tiring (chapter 5), but insofar as young women's bodies are "hopeful bodies", i.e. hope is renewed bodily in everyday acts of self-fashioning amidst the challenges of the postcolony (Mbembe 2001), young women achieve transformations of perception and hope that they will find suitable husbands, find employment and travel or migrate abroad. Or, as a photographic studio advertisement has it, the "best is still to come" (chapter 3).

By showing how young women deal with uncertainty through investment in beauty work, this thesis contributes to recent scholarship on uncertainty in Africa. It shows that uncertainty is not an external condition to be dealt with, or a product of external structures (Prattern and Cooper 2015) but is young women's "grounds for action" (di Nunzio 2014) and in reproduction actualises hope. Doing so young women accumulate "wealth in prospects" and "get ready for a chance" (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2017). Thus, this thesis contributes to a recent analysis of ritual and hope under neoliberalism by conceptualising hope as performative in embodied terms (cf. Miyazaki 2004, 2006, cf. Crapanzano 2003, Austin 1975 [1962]). In making this argument, this thesis attempts to answer Piot's question (2010) about reasons for centrality of performance to the many different domains of life in post-Cold War West Africa.

Introduction to the fieldsite

In this section, I describe the political history of Cameroon, with particular attention to Yaoundé, where the young women in this thesis live, and the Grassfields, where the villages or chiefdoms of Batcham, Babajou and Bamissengue, from which these women "originate" (figure 1).

Yaoundé is the administrative capital of Cameroon, with an estimated population of 2.5 million. This makes it the second-largest Cameroonian city after the economic capital, Douala (located at the coast). Yaoundé is located in the south-eastern part of the country, spread over seven hills on a forested plateau, and is home to the Ewondo ethnic group. Its contemporary urban landscape is an outcome of an early German and subsequent French presence, whose segregationist urban policies (Dongmo 1981) linger in the city's planning, street names and architecture, as well as the postcolonial politics of rural-urban migration and land appropriation struggles (Socpa 2010).

The earliest European presence in Yaoundé and in the Grassfields dates back to the German Protectorate of 1884–1916.[20] This was a period of intensive forced migration from the Grassfields to plantations in the south, and the introduction of a cash economy. Yaoundé was established as agricultural research and trading post between 1885 and 1887. Although the German relationship should be described as colonial, it was specifically related to commercial interests. It left a legacy of Protestantism, a transformed system with greater social stratification, and intensified both ethnic divisions under the capitalist mode of production (e.g. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000), and certain notions of ownership and authority (Le Vine 1964).

After the First World War, Cameroon was divided between the British and the French.[21] It was administered first under the mandate of the League of Nations (1919–1945), and then the UN Trusteeship Council (1945–1960). This division ran through the Grassfields. The British

20. The first European contact with the area that constitutes Cameroon today dates to the Portuguese arrival at the coast in 1472. The Portuguese did not venture inland, however, thus did not reached the Grassfields or Yaoundé. The word Cameroon derives from Portuguese *camarones*, "shrimps" (the Portuguese reportedly found an abundance of shrimp in the bay when they arrived). Before the German Protectorate which lasted until the First World War, the British, the Spanish and the Swedish were present on the coast between 1877 and 1884 (LeVine 1964:16).
21. Four-fifths of present-day Cameroon was ruled by the French under the name "Cameroun" and the remaining fifth by the British as the "British Cameroons". The British Cameroons comprised a narrow stretch of land in the west, along today's border with Nigeria. Today the Anglophone regions are administratively known as the South-West and North-West.

governed the north-western Grassfields as a part of Nigeria, with their headquarters in Lagos. The south-eastern Grassfields, where Batcham, Babajou, Bamissengue are located, were incorporated into French Cameroon and governed as a part of the French zone with its headquarters in Yaoundé. This dual colonial administrative system prevailed until independence in 1960/1961 and left a legacy of dual legal and educational systems and bilingualism in reunified Cameroon that have caused strife to the present day. Since 2016, Cameroon has seen a resurgence of the problems brought by this heritage, with violent clashes between Anglophone separatist groups (known as Ambazonia) and the government, which first instituted internet shutdowns in Anglophone regions and then deployed its Israeli-trained armed forces to shut down strife.

Cameroon's path to independence was surrounded by political terror and violence. The UPC (*Union des Populations du Cameroun*) political party promoted an anticolonial nationalist discourse and a political programme of decolonisation that swiftly gained popular and elite support. This was perceived as conflicting with a French-staged transition to nationhood, and the UPC was banned in 1955.[22] Many of its members continued the struggle through an armed guerrilla movement called *maquisards* or *maquis* whose members hid in the forests of the Grassfields. Until the 1970s Franco-Cameroonian troops engaged in brutal armed violence against the *maquis* (Deltombe et al. 2012). During this so-called *période de troubles,* Bamiléké groups started to be associated with anticolonial and then "antinational" movements. Although the young women in this thesis were born after the *période de troubles* its memories were alive for older generations and transmitted across social strata (Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko 2010). The connection with antinational movements, under the guise of "the Bamiléké problem", partially underpins ethnic "hatred" towards the Bamiléké (Socpa 1990) and, as mentioned above, together with ethnic stereotypes about their economic prowess, accounts for their self-perception of marginalisation (Farenkia 2011) in political discourse and inter-ethnic relations.

In the context of the *période de troubles*, which resembled a civil war, Ahmadou Ahidjo was installed as Cameroon's first president (1960–1982) by France, and was only "forced" to resign

22. The UPC was banned as France, already entangled in a war of independence in Algeria, could not afford to enter another war in Cameroon and hence tried to ensure ethnic turmoil and repression from the inside by supporting opposing factions. The UPC leader Ruben Um Nyobe was killed in his natal village and presidential candidate Félix-Roland Moumié was poisoned by the French secret service during a trip to Geneva, Switzerland. The candidate supported by France was Amadou Ahidjo, a Francophone Muslim from the North Region, who became the first president of Cameroon.

after 20 years of authoritarian and repressive rule. In 1982, Ahidjo was replaced by his prime minister, Paul Biya, who remains in office today (2020). After the fall of the Berlin Wall and under the pressure of "good governance and democracy", Biya introduced multipartyism but effectively, one-party politics (CPDM or Cameroon's People Democratic Movement) remains (Pigeaud 2011). Since Ahidjo, Cameroon has seen a so-called regionalisation of politics (*politique de balance régionale*) which has linked seats in government and employment in state-provided services to quotas for each region and, effectively, to the ethnic groups within them. This regionalisation was given a further twist by Biya, who tied political representation and electoral ballots to villages (*politique de village électorale*). These policies effectively reshaped territorial divisions within the country and conflated different ethnic groups by foregrounding particular criteria of similarities and differences at different times (Monga 2005). The 1980s was also the time of the so-called "return of the kings", when chiefdoms and kingdoms—despite the prediction that nation-state building would foster their decline—gained in importance. These different versions of so-called "politics of belonging" and their recent institutionalisation in the Cameroonian constitution under the discourses on autochthony and allochthony (Konings 2008, Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005, Geschiere and Jackson 2006, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Socpa 1990), continue to stir ethnic divides and "tribalism" today.

This context of a politics of belonging permeated the urban experience of young women and other Bamiléké in Yaoundé. It also fostered the forms of ethnic favouritism through which urban lives are navigated (Feldman-Savelsburg and Ndonko 2010, Page et al 2010). Since the early urban-rural migrations from the Grassfields to economic and administrative centres such as Yaoundé and the coast since the 1920s, different forms of association emerged through which mutual support—ranging from economic to moral—are practiced. Discriminated against by colonial banks, early migrants instead organised aid associations based on tontines for their hometowns (Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko 2010). Best known among these are rotating savings and credit associations, membership of which is based on village of origin, gender and social position (cf. Ardener and Burnam 1996, Feldman Savelsberg and Ndonko 2010). Associations support various aims, such as gathering funds for the development of the village, start-up funding for members' businesses, or schooling and burial assistance. Importantly, these associations provide, through kin, young women and men in cities with social networks related to their "villages of origin". Whereas young unmarried women rarely access such associations directly, they can profit through their kin from opportunities advertised through

them, such as work and employment. As Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko note (2010), even if new forms of affiliation emerged that cut across ethnic boundaries among Bamiléké living in Yaoundé, common ethnic and regional origin replaced or supplemented kinship as an important basis for trust mutual aid and access to housing and employment. Taken together with the importance of village networks and the fact the patterns of urbanisation in Yaoundé are inflected by colonial-era segregationist urban planning (Dongmo 1981) and reflect the arrival of different allogenous groups (Socpa 2010) to the capital, we might think of the young women in this thesis as "urban villagers" (Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko 2010). Although these young women lived in Yaoundé, and none were born or raised in their "villages of origin", they conceived of themselves in terms of ethnicity and village of origin, as such forms of identification were encouraged both by political discourses of state and chiefdom and by kin practices.

Within the hierarchical chiefdoms, while men in precolonial times were engaged in long-distance trade (e.g. iron, oil), women's economic role was related to local trade, cultivating fields and selling crops.[23] The Bamiléké social structure promoted single inheritance and thus encouraged young men who did not inherit to travel outside their villages in search of economic gains and upward social mobility. This in turn fostered an ethos of entrepreneurship and allowed one to climb up the chiefdom hierarchy when returning home and manifesting one's achievements (Warnier 1993, 2007). Agricultural production and trade were primarily a female domain and allowed women to manifest industriousness, gain titles and achieve status and rank in the chiefdoms. Politically women were important actors given the role of queen mothers as mediators in strife and inter-chiefdom conflicts. The association of queen mothers brought together the wives of the titled men of the chiefdom, while separate female associations existed (and continue to exist) for mothers of twins. Women could also resort to specifically female forms of protests, for example those known in the Cameroonian scholarship as Anlu rebellions in the village of Kom (Mougoué 2018, Shanklin 1990, Nkwi 1985) or as *titi ikoli* among Bakweri in southwestern Cameroon (Arneder 1975) (the so-called naked protests). Through church and state, colonial and postcolonial reforms, the political role of women was rendered

23. The first chiefdoms were established in the 16th century (Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Pradelles 1992, Warnier 1985) and consolidated during the Atlantic slave trade, when the Grassfields was a major source of slaves (Warnier 1985, Argenti and Röschenthaler 2007, Vansina 1990). During the 16th–19th centuries, nascent chiefdoms engaged in an intensive network of economic exchanges of goods such as palm oil, wood, iron and ivory, arts and crafts as well as in warfare and territorial intra- and inter-chiefdom conquests (Warnier 1985, den Ouden 1987, Dillon 1990). The Grassfields chiefdoms were highly stratified divine kingships (Frazer 1991 [1980], Tardits 1960, Pradelles 1980, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999) with a hereditary chief (*fo'*) at the top, followed by groups of notables, "quarter chiefs" and other hereditary titled groups based on age (e.g. youth warriors) and gender (e.g. women around the king's mother) among others.

merely representational, decreasing de facto female political power within chiefdoms, although other forms of power such as those related to power of the body (so-called naked rebellions) persist.

Marriage was an important status-changing institution for women. The procreative role of women was valued, as illustrated through polygamous and virilocal marriage based on bridewealth and *ndap*—a matrimonial right accumulation system that allowed for a bride's father to retain control over the reproductive and productive rights of his daughters' female offspring. Lineage was predominantly patrilineal (Hurault 1962, Tardits 1960, Pradelles de Latour 1980), although recent accounts suggest a dual kinship system existed (Feldman-Savelsberg 1999:50). Marriage in the Grassfields was conceived of as a union between two families and entailed a transfer of female productive and reproductive powers and rights between the men heading the lineages (Nyamnjoh 2002, Feldman-Savelberg 1999, Warnier 2007). This transfer could be embedded in a longstanding exchange relationship of friendship between the men and women of the families concerned, or initiate a new relation (Piot 1999), as such marriage negotiations combined the economic and emotional spheres, both for the self and for kin. Intimacy was not a private domain or opposed to collective life, but was firmly embedded within it, and mediated by exchange (i.e. economic) relationships between kin. Thus, the material/economic and affective/emotional spheres were co-constitutive (Cole and Thomas 2009).

In contrast to village ideologies, the ideologies of the state and church framed courtship and marriage as a union between individuals and, together with popular culture, promoted ideas about monogamous and companionate marriage, underpinned by romantic love, freedom in choosing a partner, and disentangled from the economic sphere. The importance this takes on today is well illustrated by the common saying: "The church says you will leave your mother and your father to establish your own family" (*l'église dit "tu vas quitter ta mère et ton père pour fonder la famille")*. Conversely, "If it is your father that chooses your wife, it is going to be a wife of your father, if a man pleases your mother, it is going to be the husband of your mother" (*la femme qui plait à ton père, c'est la femme de ton père; l'homme qui plait à ta mère, c'est le mari de ta mère*). Moreover as many young women explained: "only a village woman does not choose her husband" (*c'est seulement une villageoise qui ne choisit pas son mari*). Whereas their mothers' generation often emphasised that they could refuse candidates too, the young women and men I worked with made their desire for partner choice a sign of faith and

a marker of generational and urban distinction, which was not always easy to attain given the ongoing involvement of kin in marriage arrangements and negotiations (chapter 5).

A key institution around which much of Bamiléké social life is organised, and a main reason for young women to return to the villages, is that of "death celebrations" (*funérailles* or *cry die)* and ancestral cults materialised in skulls (*tu*). *Funérailles* are not the actual burials, which often take place much earlier, but the ritualised practice of parting with and celebrating the deceased through a lavish presentation of wealth, today requiring substantial financial means (Beuvier 2014). This symbolically ends the transition between the deceased and the heir who becomes and prolongs the deceased. The skull of the deceased is dug up some time after burial,[24] placed in a shrine (*case de crânes*) and becomes an object around which sacrifices are made (Hurault 1962, Pradelles 1980).[25] Funerals, as well as yearly family meetings, are today key occasions for which young women leave Yaoundé and travel to their villages. It is, amongst others, on such important occasions, that young women participate in village practices, dress fashionably and photograph themselves.

Research methods

This thesis draws on ten months of fieldwork carried out over two periods: November 2013 to June 2014 and March to June 2015, helped by various collaborators and assistants. My research methods comprised participant observation among young Bamiléké women at their homes, as they ran errands across town, when they went to university or work, helped their parents or kin, travelled to villages for funerals and when they attended weddings and birthday parties. At their homes I also had access to other generations. This was deepened through travels to their villages of origin in the Western Region of Cameroon, to Babajou, Bamissengue and Batcham. My methods also included photo-elicitation using prints from the 1960s to the 1990s from the Jacques Toussele Archive, the first indigenous photographer from the Western Region (Babajou), which I brought with me to the field. When, during photo-elicitation, my informants showed their own printed and digital albums I recorded those images with their permission. I also recorded images when I undertook an apprenticeship in two photographic studios and two

24. In the literature (Tardits 1960) it is reported that skulls were dug up for a second burial as part of death celebrations (*funérailles*). However, *funérailles* require substantial financial investment and might take place years after the first burial. In such cases, skulls are dug up earlier (Lancit 2010).
25. Colonisation and Christianisation transformed practices related to the dead (Tardits 1960), as well as practices of witchcraft, spirit possession, divination and herbal healing (Feldman-Savelsberg et al. 2005, den Ouden 1987, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000).

sewing shops. Finally, towards the end of the fieldwork, I and my collaborators and assistants conducted 60 semi-structured interviewees with young women, their parents, grandmothers, seamstresses, tailors and photographers (including seven in-depth interviews with photographers, 15 with seamstresses and tailors) and organised a radio debate about fashion. I also carried out research in the archives of the National Textile Company in Douala and conducted a series of interviews with Jacques Toussele on his photographic collection.

Two brokers facilitated the recruitment of most of my research participants. I encountered the first on the second day after my arrival when I was lost and the fashionably dressed Adelaide offered to guide me to where I wished to go. Through our conversation it turned out that not only was she was from one of the three villages I aimed to focus my research on, she was also, she said, interested in photography. She photographed herself as soon as she had new clothes, she explained, leaving me to wonder what this could mean. It was largely this meeting and Adelaide's interest in fashion and photography that guided my early research and facilitated my entry to the field as she introduced me to her kin and friends. Her attitude and the ease with which she let me enter her life was by no means typical. People were curious who she was hanging out with and I became a convenient excuse for her to leave the house. At first, I felt she looked to me for advice on fashion but after realising I was not as knowledgeable as she, our roles were reversed. I was given advice and reprimanded for my lack of knowledge and skill in dressing and posing—in itself, a valuable way of gathering data and knowledge (Bloch 1998). She was my first field broker and her family became my adoptive family.

Adelaide and her family enabled me to build up my network: mentioning her or her kin's names opened many doors. Her married older sister was a trader in fashionable clothing from Turkey, her other sister a seamstress. Her uncle worked at the National Textile Company and had his own stands selling *pagne* at the market. I started to realise how much easier research was when Adelaide came with me or when I went to meet a person she knew and when she referred me to them. Of course, some people were still suspicious of her white friend but usually awkwardness disappeared when she managed the opening of the conversation. Even when she did not accompany me, mentioning her or her kin would often open doors for me. This alerted me to the importance of building a reputation, as chapters 2 and 3 will show. On the other hand, when alone, I found it challenging to manage my gender and race positionality.

Thus, I resorted to working with an assistant who became my second broker to the field. This was Annie, a young anthropology student from Babajou village. She introduced me to rotating credit and savings associations for married women from the three villages I was interested in. I introduced my research to these associations and some of the women volunteered to put me in touch with their daughters. Others turned out either to know photographers or to be involved in fashion. Annie also brought me to student association meetings, mainly attended by men, which met every other Sunday. I attended many of those meetings in the first months of my fieldwork and recruited participants for my research through snowball sampling. Yet as few young women were present at these meetings, once I felt I had a solid network of relationships I stopped attending. Then my fieldsite shifted to hair salons and sewing shops—to which Annie also introduced me—where young women, I was told, would be most often found.

As language is key for successful fieldwork, I was keen to learn. Annie taught me the basics of Ngombale which, I am afraid, I have not developed very far as, in practice, the young women I worked with preferred to talk to me in French. This was partly because we were in an urban environment and partly because many did not speak their native languages well, to their own regret (Annie was exceptional in this). However, being able to say basic greetings helped to establish trust in conversations when working with other generations for even though I did not speak Ngombale people appreciated that I was making an effort to learn. Throughout my fieldwork, Annie also helped interpret interviews, especially with grandmothers who did not speak French. Through Annie I also worked occasionally with Pamela, Arnoux and Ghiselain, all of whom facilitated different relationships and provided fieldwork assistance, though none was fully available for sustained collaboration. However, while Annie and Adelaide were significant for my early research, I still felt my gender and race positionality hindered further development in my research.

Then, I was fortunate to be introduced by another researcher, Maybritt Jill Alpes, to a young sociologist, Felicite Djoukouo (whose name note signifies luck!), who accompanied me in my research for ten months. This proved to be great experience and evolved into a close friendship. Working with her as my assistant finally propelled my research forward as I was perceived to be her friend and thus situations of distance and formality turned fairly quickly into ones of closeness and informality. Having an assistant was particularly helpful in formal settings such as the National Textile Company or the Ministry of Women. Felicite was not only highly educated but extremely bright and intelligent, enrolled in a PhD programme and was Bamiléké.

However, she was from a different region than my primary focus, which is why I do not include her among the young women discussed in this thesis. At the beginning we worked together, doing participant observation in photographic studios and sewing shops, where I learned from her how to work out the relationships while she figured out what the anthropological inquiry was about. Her focus on quantitative data complemented my qualitative approach well and, towards the end of my fieldwork, we worked separately. When I worked with young women in Adelaide's and Annie's circles and stayed at their homes, Felicite was not present and she only rarely interacted with the young women (apart from seamstresses) on whom this thesis focuses. Her reticence about getting into more casual participant observation (other than at sewing shops, photographic studios and institutional interviews) was not only influenced by her training. As it meant acting between young women I figured out this was her way of avoiding female competition, gossip and the "dangers of intimacy" (cf. Geschiere 2013) that this thesis brings to light (chapters 2 and 5).

Being introduced to the field through others alerted me to the importance of social networks and social relations as guarantors or brokers of trust. Yet the further work of enhancing, solidifying and maintain relationships and trust was brought home to me by Felicite as we negotiated her salary and research expenses and she budgeted a substantial amount for gifts. That relationships are established and maintained through gifts is a truism for an anthropologist. Whereas I learnt how to talk my way out of the frequent greeting of "what did you keep for me?" *(tu m'as gardé quoi?)* as fieldwork advanced, maintaining relationships and trust proceeded through offering, for example, taxi money, drinks and food on a daily basis. Engaging in these exchange relationships—despite my meagre research allowance—was also of considerable help in navigating the relations I found most challenging: those with older generations who perceived me as a young woman who was, regrettably, still at school. Gifting and sharing (including dresses, images and photographs) was pervasive and became one of the themes of my research (chapter 4).

The ease with which I constituted my research networks in a chaotic and unpredictable urban environment is partly also owed to the fact that I worked with a single ethnic group which was allogène in Yaoundé. In a context of ethnic animosity, when I explained my research interest, many of my interlocutors perceived me as siding with them. Working with young Bamiléké women led me to focus on three districts of Yaoundé where this ethnic group is said to be represented most prominently: Biyem Assi, Mendong and Efoulan. Displaying my (limited)

knowledge of the Grassfields and its history—apart from alerting me to the cultural importance of display (*se vanter*) which is reflected throughout the thesis—made young women interested in me partly because for them the links to the village and to tradition were important. It also helped me to navigate conversations with male elders in terms other than as a young student to be instructed about their "traditions", although the latter was helpful in itself. However, my fieldsite was not restricted to the above-mentioned areas of Yaoundé as many of the photographic studios and sewing shops were located elsewhere.

While much of what this thesis describes is knowledge as embodied by young women, it was also articulated by "experts" such as photographers, seamstresses and fashonistas (chapter 3) through their narratives (Jackson 1989, Stoller 1989). Indeed, it was in photographic studios and sewing shops that I quickly stumbled upon limits of discursive knowledge. Much of the visual self-fashioning young women engaged in involved embodied knowledge and thus I resorted to apprenticeships in the studios and sewing shops. Whereas working at the photographic studios proved challenging because of my gender in these all-male environments, I found two studio spaces, Focus Photos and Willy Photo, where I helped out for four months and where the photographers considered my prior training in photography useful. Apart from "learning to see", i.e. how images were made and what kind of images were desired and which not, I also tried to learn how to pose. As I learnt which kinds of images were desired, I also acted as a photographer at various occasions such as funerals and weddings, and for star-like photo sessions with young women, at their request.

Finding sewing shops to apprentice in was easier. This is not to say that all-female environments are friendlier: often, the atmosphere was fraught with suspicion, jealousy and competition as much as with female solidarity. Whereas it is common practice to take up apprenticeship and pay for it, it is through social relationships that one is accepted into sewing shops for, as I was told, all seamstresses know that one day their apprentice may be a competitor, and even steal away their clients. I however was quickly accepted as seamstresses soon saw my hands were not particularly nimble and there was little chance I would ever become a competitor. Being surrounded largely by women made my research environment more comfortable and gave the means to learn how these women managed their own relations with men. Learning to see what a good dress looks and feels entailed getting dresses made for myself. Helping to shoot and edit images at the photographic studios, and make dress designs and stitch them was fun and further transformed my status from outsider to insider. I visited

two sewing shops, Gwen Fashion and Vicky Style, regularly at the start of my fieldwork but went less often after six months. This was partly because I had by then recruited a new group of young women I wanted to follow, and felt that my relationships with seamstresses were well developed.

As previously noted, in order to historicise what I describe below as young women's visual practices of self-fashioning I conducted photo-elicitation using a sample from the Jacques Toussele archive. At times people refused to talk to me about these photographs as they were uncertain of my ownership of these images and the purpose to which they might be put. Whereas I do not discuss this at length in what follows, photographs can be used in the practice of witchcraft (as can hair, nails and so on, but also a name written on a piece of paper). The suspicion as to the means by which I obtained their images, and what I was doing with them (and to them) should be seen in this light (Strother 2013). The task of interviewing was considerably easier with young women and with photographers, seamstresses and tailors when the image was of a person one did not know (cf. Gesichere 2013).

While it is obvious that fieldwork is serendipitous, we might think how this shapes one's research interests and methods. When my fieldwork started to accelerate, it was perhaps because my research strategies started to echo those of the young women this thesis describes. Working with different assistants at the onset of my fieldwork resembled how young women accumulated "wealth in prospects" in their lives (Johnson-Hanks 2017). The uncertainty around which relationship would work out, when it would bear fruit, made me consider it best to keep as many relations as possible. From this premise the different instances described above constituted "vital conjunctions", not in my interlocutors' lives, but for my own research (Johnson-Hanks 2002, 2007).

In order to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors their names are anonymised throughout the thesis, and those whose photographs illustrate this thesis are not identified by name neither in the captions nor in the chapters.

Chapter outline

This thesis examines how young women fashion their selves and social relations through beauty, dress and photographs. If through visual self-fashioning young women commodify their bodies as objects for display (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991), I argue, self-fashioning emerges as skills and embodied knowledge through which women alter their social positions and fashion broadly conceived paths of upward mobility. Self-fashioning thus amounts to beauty work—both the work necessary to invest in and produce beauty, and the work that beauty does to produce alluring surfaces. Around this work followers are gathered, reputations are formed or challenged, and men fall in love. Insofar as visual self-fashioning is recognised and appreciated in terms of skills and embodied knowledge, this thesis further suggests, gender emerges not as an internal bodily essence, but as the effect of exterior performance: a skill for crafting surfaces that reveals gender and female aesthetic subjectivities as being made. We see, in each chapter, how young women use the different skills that make up beauty work: makeup and hairstyling (chapter 1), making and displaying dresses (chapters 2 and 3), making and displaying photographs (chapters 4 and 5). Cumulatively these chapters also show that visual self-fashioning should be seen as performative of embodied hope (cf. Miyazaki 2014) and means to accumulate "wealth in prospects" (Johnson-Hanks 2017); that is, hopeful ways out of waithood (Honwana 2012) in which young *filles androides* are stuck.

The first chapter, "Making beauty", examines how beauty practices have changed across three generations. It historicises the thesis's main argument, that beauty work consists of embodied knowledge and visual skills. In this chapter I highlight how making beauty requires skills in bodily display, and where, how, and what for it has been learnt and practiced by young women and their mothers and grandmothers. By historicising how beauty was made across generations the chapter reveals how, in contemporary Yaoundé, making beauty is an increasingly economically individual and female affair. As such, this chapter is a backdrop for the actions of young women that the remaining chapters describe.

The second chapter, "Fashioning seductiveness", asks how seduction is fashioned through dress styles. Set against the backdrop of the governmental DVD-VCD campaign (2014) which aimed to regulate female dress in public space, and by extension female sexual agency, the chapter analyses how young women aiming to seduce through dress negotiate the campaign. It

shows how making and wearing dresses for seduction amounts to a technology of (dis)enchantment (Gell 1988), that is, engaging or disengaging—in other words, managing—erotic desire from the self and the other through alluring performances; and how this allows young women to accumulate "wealth in men" (Guyer and Belinga 1995).

The third chapter, "Fashioning respectability", discusses visual self-fashioning through skills of making and wearing dresses but turns to the other side of the campaign, away from restrictions towards sexuality to encouragements of respectability. The chapter asks how, in a context where "sexy" is discouraged but the respectable *kaba* dress is no longer an option, young women fashion respectability through dress. It shows how young women work on developing their "fashion competence" (cf. Madison and Hansen 2014); and argues through circulation of fashionable styles (Munn 1986, Weiner 1992) —thanks to the camera of the android phone which enables the allure of dresses to be extended—young women can build up reputations as fashionistas, earn respect, gain money, and accumulate "wealth in followers" around the sensibilities they share (Meyer 2010).

The fourth chapter, "Fashioning hope", examines another component of beauty work: the skill of bodily display or of posing. It does this as young women who designed and stitched their dresses, venture to photographic studios to, as they put it, "get their dresses photographed". This chapter discusses young women's *poster* competences (Mauss 1973 [1935]) as they are trained in Yaoundé's photographic studios under the expert eyes of male photographers. The chapter argues young women's photographic performance—through the engagement of the skill of make-believe—generates hope that "the best is still to come" (cf. Miyazaki 2006). While mobile phones further afford possibilities to ritualise such performances (Turner 1982, 1987) and bodily actualise hope, the circulation of photographs extends the actualisation of hope to kin.

The fifth chapter, "Entrepreneurs of love", brings together the themes of self-fashioning as a beauty work, of making femininity and gender, and of generating hope. Focusing on the skill of displaying the self online, it examines how young women use photographs to "catch men" for marriage and to create wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). It shows how young women skilfully edit their images, aiming to lure men, and how online seduction enterprises involve minute surveillance of others generating much competition. This keeps young women busy improving their skills for crafting surfaces and constantly updating fashionable displays,

which makes high affective demands on them and can lead to a love burnout. Thus, this chapter points out, beauty work is also taxing emotional work (Hochschild 2003 [1983]) which can limit hope.

The thesis concludes by looking at the contemporary situation of young women I got to know in the field and kept on being in touch with ever since. Their current lives draw out how beauty work actually results in social and economic advancement, however tenuous, but does not necessary increase desired marriage opportunities. Thus, many of young women continue to invest in fashion, have children. Some have recently even launched their fashion collections while others, though not many, have migrated abroad. Consequently, most have delayed marriage, albeit unwillingly. Most continue to hope that “the best is still to come”.



Figure 3. Bene's eyelash extensions attached by her sister. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

ONE:

Making beauty

Bene, whom we met at the opening of the previous chapter, was a young woman in her mid-twenties. She was sitting at the door of her parents' house in Yaoundé's Biyem Assi district, waiting for Daisy, her younger sister, to return. Daisy had left that morning for what was often referred to imprecisely, so as to purposefully hide the details, as *faire un tour.* It was Sunday afternoon and Bene was alone at home. Her parents, like many others, spent that day attending meetings of village saving and credit associations (*réunions* or *tontines*). Two of her brothers had gone to participate in student association meetings on the university campus. Bene, the oldest of the siblings, had stayed home to cook (*préparer*). When I had arrived earlier in the afternoon, I found her dressed in a long and ample blue dress, her newly-made short "Chinese hairstyle" (*la chinoise)* covered by a black net. Bene finished sorting out the beans and, as dusk was falling. We heard noise of a motorbike approaching and Daisy finally appeared. Watching Daisy disembark from a moto-taxi with her head turned in such a way as to expose her new

rasta hairstyle, a movement that highlighted its volume, Bene exclaimed: "Wow, *nyanga*" and froze with beans still in her hands. Bene's eyes were glued on Daisy in amazement and surprise as she walked towards us slowly in a manner resembling a model on the catwalk. "This must have costed at least 20,000 FCFA!" Bene exclaimed. "You are jealous! My hairstyle is better than yours!"—Daisy responded teasing her older sister who had got her own new hairstyle made the day before at a salon called "Hairdresser of Stars" (*Coiffeur de stars).*

In the ensuing argument, Bene questioned Daisy as to where she had got the money for her hairstyle. Daisy told us stories about visits to kin where she had gathered the means, but Bene was hard to convince. Ultimately, she refused to believe Daisy. Yet the younger sister wanted to have Bene on her side by any means. "Wait," Daisy interrupted Bene, seeming to feel that she was losing the battle, and took out from a pocket of her jeans what turned out to be the ultimate weapon. "I will share those with you"—she showed a set of artificial eyelash extensions to Bene. "There are two pairs. And I will attach them now!" Bene's fierce tone disappeared in an instant. After a careful examination of the quality of the eyelashes and asking Daisy several questions about how good these were for her skin, the deal seemed to be sealed. "Hurry up!" Bene urged her sister as we heard the sound of a car engine in the distance. Daisy took out the glue and applied it to Bene's eyelids (fugure 3). "It itches!" Bene complained but Daisy ordered her to withstand the pain if she really wanted the eyelashes to make her look beautiful. These eyelashes resembled those of Charlotte Dipanda, a popular Cameroonian singer, who was widely admired among the young women I worked with, and whose songs Daisy and Bene whistled throughout the day. The car approached the front of the house and the sound of the engine stopped. By the time the door slammed shut, and their father was walking towards us, the operation was over. In an instant the young woman returned to the kitchen and continued to housework.

As I came to know more young women through my fieldwork it turned out that engaging in various practices to embellish one's body was not only common, it was a domain of female interest and intense economic and emotional investment despite other duties and obligations and, often, restricted economic means. How, this chapter asks, have such women conceived of and invested in beauty across generations and what does this tell us about their investments in beauty today?

In what follows, I define beauty as a set of bodily practices that include various means of enhancing the visual attraction of one's physical appearance. Aside from Turner's observation (1980) that among the inhabitants of the Kalahari Desert shiny skin is considered an attractive feature, to the extent that in times of famine animal fats may be used not for food but to embellish the skin, an explicit focus on beauty remains scarce in anthropology scholarship on Africa. An early exception is Bonne's monograph (1986) on ideals of female beauty among the Mende of Liberia. Her ethnographic findings resemble my field observations: a connection between beauty and morality not only in terms of appearance but also of female industriousness, and the display of beauty used as a strategy to gain prestige and respect. Influenced by an art-historical framework, however, Bonne's analysis focuses on the symbolism of aesthetic qualities in Sande society masks rather than the "body beautiful" itself. As such female bodies are depicted as passive receptors of stable cultural meanings.

Further helpful perspectives on beautified bodies emerge in scholarship influenced by the concept of embodiment (Csordas 1990). As such the "body beautiful" is not only symbolically capable of reflecting the social world and thus reproducing dominant social values but, equally, of resisting and transforming these values. Comaroff and Comaroff (1992:43) have shown how fashion and beauty become a site of colonial contestation among Tswana in South Africa. The body is here both a vehicle for the imposition of the colonial project as, for example, certain styles or sanitation norms are channelled therein, but also for resistance to that colonial project through, for example, flamboyant styles. This, particularly, has a gendered dimension. In this vein, albeit from a different analytical perspective, Thomas has shown for South Africa (2006), Mustafa for Senegal (2006) and Mougoué for Cameroon (2019), how the use of commodified beauty products can be geared to controlling female appearance, and by extension the female body, tied in with (colonial) notions of respectability, and implying certain gender, race and class hierarchies. Equally, these accounts stress how the ways in which beauty products are used can unsettle gender norms and conceptions. If these accounts are helpful to show how beauty norms can be transformed to become forms of political action, we might then ask: what if actors submit consciously to beauty norms?

Popene (2004), writing about female fattening among Azawagh Arabs in Niger, argues that getting fat is itself a form of labour and is not only expressive of cultural norms but provides a way for women to exercise agency in their own lives. Because fat bodies are associated with enhanced sexuality, fat women immobilised in tents in the desert exert gravity on, and stabilise

the volatility of, men who are herding and trading away from home (2004:195). By attaining the "body beautiful" ideal, Popene concludes, a woman proves herself able to control her own desire and forgo individual interests in favour of society. While Popene shows how female agency might be located not in outward rejection of beauty norms (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 1992) but in submission to them (Mahmood 2005), her account remains problematic: the relationship between the individual and society remains assumed (as oppositional) while the notions of personhood and body animating such beauty practices remain unexamined.

Addressing the question of changing conceptions of personhood and the role the body plays therein, Burke examines the commodification of cleanness in Zimbabwe, showing how notions of the self and the body underpinning the consumption of new toiletries draw on and transform earlier conceptions of the body and self. As such, processes are entwined with Christianity and nation-state building; they are also intimately tied to the commodification of the female body. This objectification of the female body on the one hand and, on the other, the female empowerment that beauty practices might foster—the so-called "double-bind" of beauty practices—is identified as a contradiction in the Western feminist analysis of beauty (Felski 2006). In this vein, Groes-Green, for example, shows how the commodification of the female body that beautifying one's body entails is actually desirable among Mozambiquan *curtidoras*, because such practices pertain to wider moral economies around the redistribution of wealth (2013). As such, while *curtidoras* engage in the practices of "putting men into the bottle" they do not overthrow gendered inequalities in Mozambique, but create a space for female assertiveness (ibid).[26] Contemporary feminist Africanist scholarship recognises too that African women fashion and beautify themselves at the interstices of colonial, local, global and neo-colonial grammars (Dosekun 2016, Dogbe 2003), and this chapter follows in their path to move beyond the binary of reinforcement versus resistance.

This chapter builds on existing scholarship and departs from it in several ways. Following Burke (1996) and Thomas (2005), I am concerned with integrating an understanding of how changing beauty practices work through ideas about the body and redefined notions of personhood. Following Groes-Green (2013) I consider the consumption associated with beauty

26 Following the recent feminist injunctions not to immediately translate "aesthetic surfaces into political depths" the new questions around beauty for feminist politics are not so much moral but pragmatic: "how is beauty defined, deployed, defended, subordinated, marked or manipulated, and how do these tactics intersect with gender and value?" (Colebrook 2006:132) Beauty analysis, according to these theorists, should combine political economy and—as an effect of the recent turn to affect—an embodied process/experience that is not reducible to it (Felski 1995, Colebrook 2006, Berlant 2006).

in conjunction with redistribution embedded in moral economies related to kinship and marriage. Contending however that these approaches omit understandings of beauty in terms of visual skills and embodied knowledge, I instead propose to start the analysis of the beauty practices of young Bamiléké women from the notion of the body itself (Warnier 2007). Thus, the following chapter examines how beauty is a skill and embodied knowledge and how it has changed over time. From this perspective the chapter enquires into transformations of "beauty work" which animate visual self-fashioning as Bamiléké women across generations work to enhance the appeal of the skin.

This study argues that visual self-fashioning objectifies and commodifies young women's bodies for display and the male gaze, but is simultaneously valued as a form of visual skill and embodied knowledge. In this chapter I inscribe this broader argument within the historical trajectory of female bodily practices by analysing beauty practices across generations. In particular I argue that the ways in which young women fashion their bodies today resemble how their mothers and grandmothers engaged with beauty, as making beauty continues to manifest one's skills and social capital (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Today, however, it tends to economically fall on young women (and their kin) and involves a different set of relations speaking to wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017, chapter 2 and 5).

The first section of this chapter looks at the semiotics of *faire le nyanga*—the phrase Bene used to describe her sister in the opening vignette—to analyse what making beauty means and entails. The second section examines the ways in which bodies were embellished among young women's grandmothers to shed light on particular configurations of body, beauty and morality that inform certain "aesthetics of prestige" underpinning beauty work. The third section examines the ways in which such configurations were inflected by the church and state discourses and practices around the time of independence in 1960, and how such inflections concomitantly fostered and entwined with the "aesthetics of respectability". The fourth section shows how, where and when young women make beauty today and draws out continuities and divergences with the past.

Faire le nyanga

Bene and Daisy were 26 and 23 years old. Daisy was enrolled at the university, studying biology, and Bene had recently graduated in accounting. Bene graduated before I met her, and

throughout my fieldwork Daisy rarely attended classes as they kept being cancelled. They lived on the outskirts of Mendong, a *quartier* of Yaoundé populated mainly by Bamiléké, in an unfinished house. Their father was a teacher in a public secondary school but his salary had not been paid for months; a reason, he pointed out, why the house was not finished. Their mother rented a stand in one of Yaoundé's markets at which she sold clothes and items for newborns. As the "market is tough" (le *marché est dur)* and clients were lacking these days, she also engaged in itinerant sales around her neighbourhood. She often tried out new ways of making money, and had recently begun selling items from her shop at the credit and saving associations she participated in. With Bene she prepared hibiscus juice and bags of nuts for sale in a constant struggle to stretch the household budget for five children.

Let's return to the opening vignette. As Bene and Daisy were busy preparing a meal for their father in the compound kitchen, I joined him on one of the living room couches. He turned on the TV but its poor signal and the variable electricity voltage made it difficult to follow the news. We discussed recent political events, ongoing Boko Haram raids in Northern Cameroon and many other topics. Then the meal was over and young women came in again, this time to pick up our empty plates. The father glanced at Bene's new eyelash extensions. As he did not remark on the eyelashes, which were hard to miss due to their volume and length, I asked what he thought about his daughters' investments in their looks. Having verified that Bene and Daisy were gone he smiled:

> Woman should be pleasurable to see (*agréable à voir*). At their age it is important to do *nyanga*, they should marry soon. *Nyanga* is what women do. It is like nuptial ballet […] I don't mind that they spent time doing *nyanga* as long as they do other things too. […] When they are clean (*propre*) they look good, I'm proud. […]

Nyanga, the term Bene's and Daisy's father used to refer to his daughters' makeup, derives from Cameroonian Pidgin English and is translated as "putting on airs and graces", "dressing up", or "pretending to be better off than one is" (Todd, 1982: 122, Mougoué 2019), revealing it as a domain of bodily practice entailing "performative capacity" (Ferguson 1999). Whereas some would argue that *nyanga* is an ethnic practice from the Anglophone regions, others would say it has its roots in the practices of coastal Douala people. However, most young women would agree that no matter where *nyanga* comes from, today it is a Cameroonian practice and each and every woman does *nyanga* "at her own measure" (*nyanga à sa mesure)*. *Nyanga*

denotes a set of corporeal practices: bodily skills of display used to generate attractiveness, to call attention through visual appearance and to enhance one's presence in public space. It comprises cleaning and embellishing one's skin, certain ways of moving one's body, posing and behaving; dressing, makeup and hairstyles that could otherwise be termed "arts of parading". It can be compared to what Groes-Green describes as the "theatrics of attraction" among *curtadoras* in Mozambique (2013) and the practices of seduction amongst the *dirriankes* described by Mustafa in urban Dakar (2006).

Note that Bene's and Daisy's father talked about *nyanga* as a way of *doing* (*manière de faire*), semantically placing beauty in a domain of embodied knowledge, skills and practice. *Faire le nyanga* entails dressing well and having a clean body, which in turn translates from Ngiemboon literally as "my body is well" (*mon corps est bien*), highlighting both the embodiment and the sensory effects achieved by such practices. Young women often use this phrase in the context of the effects achieved through makeup, dress (chapters 2 and 3) and photographic practices (chapter 4). "My body is well," Daisy often concluded about her accomplished appearance, explaining this is when you feel pleasure and illuminating the claim made when young women say *I do beauty for myself*. Just how important pleasure is in these practices is well illustrated through the name of the genre of photographs known as *photos de plaisir* (chapter 4). From this perspective we might think of beauty, dressing and posing in terms of "work on and of the body", i.e. as investments into one's body to create appearances that procure sensory effects for the self and other. This is what, in this thesis, I call *beauty work*. As such, the intense ways in which the young women who were my primary interlocutors invest in beauty echo what Warnier argues is central to the construction of subjectivity in the Grassfields: an "over-investment" in the skin (2007).

Bene's and Daisy's father also framed *nyanga* as a distinctively female domain, something a woman has to learn (cf. Mustafa 2002), and compared it to courtship display (*ballet nuptial*). *Nyanga* is, my older interlocutors stressed, a bodily practice learnt through female kin and geared to attract potential partners by eliciting sexual attraction. Other interlocutors framed *nyanga* not only in terms of a "theatrics of attraction", but also in terms of private erotics, or the ways in which women are able to both attain sexual pleasure themselves and enhance it for men during sexual intercourse, echoing the practices in Mozambique described by Groes-Green. If young women in turn privilege the understanding of *nyanga* as a "theatrics of

attraction" over "*ars erotica*" (cf. Groes-Green 2013), this is today partly related, I suggest, to a striving for respectability (chapter 2).

Keeping young men away is challenging in a shared and open compound—men could secretly observe how *nyanga* is taught, and were admonished when caught. But it was not so much the observation that was punished, Bene's and Daisy's grandmother explained, but speaking about it. Men back then, as now, had to abide by the rules of public secrecy, that, as Ferme notes, often characterise gendered practices in West Africa (2001). *Nyanga* is not to be overtly talked about by men and the cultivation of *nyanga* away from the male gaze only increases its attractiveness. Thus, Bene and Daisy hid away from their father while making beauty, and their father was cautious about talking about these practices in their presence, speaking to the concealment with which the efficacy of *nyanga* is invested as a technology of enchantment (Gell 1988, chapter 2), even if the dynamics of concealment and revelation are altered today (see also below, chapter 2).

Aesthetics of prestige

The ways in which young women today learn how to attract attention resonates with the earlier ways in which Bamiléké women's bodies had been made objects of attention and attraction. One such way concerned the context of marriage.

Whereas the Bamiléké do not have initiation practices, some women of Bene's grandmother's generation (born around the 1930s) described individual fattening rituals where women were put "on rest" in the family compound for several weeks and fed well in order for their body to take on rounded, "heavy" shapes. This manifested, literally and economically, kin's ability to feed many people, for one had to have additional food to keep on feeding the daughter put on rest, signalling that the rest of the family were also sufficiently fed. This in turn revealed wealth in social relations, be it in form of dependents that worked to cultivate the fields or friendships with whom one traded and who sent gifts (Guyer and Belinga 1995, Bayart 1989). Note that here, family wealth was literally displayed on young women's skin (Warnier 2007, Rowlands 1994) through an aesthetic of volume. While "resting" some women of Bene's grandmother's generation also learnt skills of display and dance from female associations—a knowledge that

was paid for—and these were later performed in front of audiences (cf. Feldman-Savelsberg 2010). Bene's great-aunt recalled that different dances were available, depending on the family's rank. These were considered attractive not only because they evoked wealth and good health (Rowlands 1994, Popeone 2004), but also because they generated pleasure and entertainment. The fact that such "rituals" were individual speaks of the competition between families for the best candidates for their daughters and thus for upward social mobility for the entire family, resonating with young women's competition on the marriage market today (chapter 5).

The individual *nyanga* practices of Bene's grandmother's generation resemble the *moninkim* female associations described by Röschenthaler in the Cross-River region of Nigeria (2011). Although Röschenthaler does not claim these associations were present in the Grassfields, certainly many elements appear to be shared. For example, both entailed individual seclusion, to beautify one's body, and apprenticeship in display skills, and were followed by visits to kin to demonstrate family wealth—seclusion and apprenticeships were both costly endeavours (ibid). Usually such displays, while rare, as Bene's great-aunt stressed, were appreciated and kin would acknowledge this by giving gifts. Note the exceptionality or extraordinariness of such acts invest them with value: rarity attracted the eye (Weiner 1992, chapter 3). This was also a way of "advertising one's daughter" if she had not yet found a husband (Röschenthaler 2011:240). Grassfields dance associations, like *monimkin*, as the description of Bene's great-aunt indicates, had a grading system that was tied to lineage. The top grades were reserved for women from the wealthiest families and those related to chiefdom notables. The transmission of membership proceeded from mother to daughter, revealing how the most complex dances—the most beautiful and thus the most prized—were entangled with and maintained a certain hierarchy of beauty and wealth.[27]

Another way of doing *nyanga* of the past (*nyanga de l'époque*) in the context of marriage entailed scarification. On a rare visit to her mother's village near Mbouda, Daisy asked her grandmother, born in 1932, a former chief's wife and today in her late 80s, about *nyanga de l'époque.* The grandmother responded:

27. Like the *moninkim* described by Röschenthaler, Bene's grandmother explained that after independence, Grassfields practices and dances were incorporated into the rotating credit and saving associations, and today are often performed at funerals (2011). Recall from the introduction membership in such associations is reserved for married women. Thus, young women, in most cases, cannot learn these dances until they marry and enter associations unless they come from noble families. As such dances serve new purposes, such as celebrating the deceased, rather than displaying skills in view of increasing value of a young woman and in doing so attracting a desired candidate for marriage.

> Before there were also scarifications (figure 4). Wealthier families could afford that… These were flowers painted on the body [pointing to her belly] Body was embellished like this everyone could see you are well taken care of! … but it also hurt! … […]



Figure 4. Unnamed women showing examples of scarification from Grassfields around Mbouda (c.1940s). Photo credit: courtesy of Francois Ebouele.

Scarification, she further narrated, covered the belly and the back (chapter 2) and was usually paid for by the family a woman was to marry into as a part of the bridewealth exchange, or the family she married into after having children, in recognition of her procreative capacity or the work she did in the fields. While Bene and Daisy's grandmother said that scarification was reserved for wealthy families, other older woman recalled that it was available to everyone but that different families could afford different motifs, some of which I was told had erotic significance.[28] The aesthetic of volume spoke to the rank of the person: the greater the surface area covered by scarification, the higher its price and thus the higher the rank (Onguom 1979), further revealing how hierarchies were entangled with beauty. But, it was often stressed in the narratives, not every wife would have scarification: certain wives were more recognised than others presumably for their capacities and achievements (Guyer and Belinga 1995).

28. Several accounts indicate that men also had scarification, but it would have seemed these were done for different reasons and had different motives (Onguom 1979, see also Bohannan 1956). My research on scarification was hindered by its rarity and translation requirements which I hope to complement by archival research in the future.

But if fattening rituals, dance learning and scarification—which create volume and physically enlarge one's presence—were reserved for chiefdom notables and persons of wealth and rank (Bayart 1986), other grandmothers recalled another aesthetic, manifested through glow and sheen. This was achieved through displaying excess palm or groundnut oil: by mixing it with camwood (a red-coloured wood that was ground into powder) and applied in a paste as a cosmetic which also lightened the skin.[29] The display materialised and indexed the wealth of the family, showing that it had enough resources to satisfy more mundane needs such as feeding everyone and did not need this oil for cooking. Similar to Bonne's observations among Mende (1986) as well as Bohannan among Tiv (1956) among the Bamiléké the "glow and shine" effect was valued for its attractiveness and how it could enhance one's visibility and distinguish one from others (cf. Turner 1980). Indeed, the very word for beauty in Ngiemboon, *meshum*, signifies that the body that shines or glows and also denotes clarity in the sense of light. A similar word refers to sunbeams (*nem meshua*), to the headlights of a car and to eye shadow—the latter two are also referred to using the same French word, *phares*. A related term, signifies the light of the day or the light of a lamp in the photographic studio (*meshum nem nea*).

But as one grandmother put it: "one did not have enough oil every day!" That is, for some families, delivering a *nyanga* performance involved pulling together considerable resources for a temporary end, speaking to how an investment in young women's beauty could represent the work of an entire family and be an exceptional achievement. On the other hand, this expression signals a potential for pretence—since one did not have enough oil every day, I was told by the same grandmother that others might be curious of the source of such an exceptional achievement, and inquire into where the wealth came from and what lay behind its manifestation. As mentioned earlier, Bamiléké social structures encourage and value entrepreneurship and individual achievement (see introduction), not least due to the custom of exclusive inheritance, as the majority who did not inherit (e.g. land) travelled outside their villages in search of economic (e.g. trade) and other opportunities (Warnier 1993, 2007; see introduction) and returned to manifest their success. But such statements point also to longstanding concerns about the legitimacy of wealth and practices of accumulation (Geschiere and Konings 1993). As this chapter will later show, these resonate with discourses on beauty among young women today.

29. While such cosmetics are still used both in urban and rural areas, for example in village marriage rituals where camwood is rubbed onto the ankles of both bride and groom, my interlocutors of all generations agreed that outside ritual practices women use it more than men.

Furthermore, it required skill for women to display their bodies, complete with decorations of all kinds. The ways in which one could parade had to be learned, and older women in particular recalled how they imitated the movements of women from the chiefdom they observed at different events in the villages. One such event was the initiation into the Bamiléké secret society *laakam* manifested through display of female bodies—of the wives of chiefs and notables—decorated with white chalk. Older women who attended these events would demonstrate how to move the body and how to walk, while younger women would imitate them, often with mixed results. These, one grandmother recalled, resulted in laughter. "She will learn little by little and we will encourage her," another of Daisy's grandmothers explained, clasping her hands, ululating and moving her body to illustrate. Once it was considered that young women knew how to do *nyanga*—to "imitate well"—they could venture into public spaces. A prime occasion to learn skills from others through observation, as well as to display one's own skills was on market day. This ensured the broadest spectatorship as even "the chief can pass by".[30] Note the implications of imitation here—copying was understood as a skill in crafts.

Making *nyanga* participated in and indexed marital/intimate economies, as when scarification was performed in return for female procreative labour or work in the fields, or prior to marriage when dancing skills were displayed in view of finding a husband. Yet *nyanga* was not restricted to marriage or intimate contexts. Because of the effects *nyanga* was said to achieve, both men and women used *nyanga*, showed off (*se vanter*) their decorated bodies in skilful ways, in order to impress and influence others. With involvement in continuing regional trade, labour migrations to the plantations and the coast from 1884, and as some later became enrolled into colonial (and even later, postcolonial) state structures, men returning to Grassfields villages had increased resources to manifest, assert or challenge their social position at home (den Ouden 1987, Nkwi and Warnier 1982) by investing in their own, their wives and daughters' bodies. The generation of the mothers of today's young women recalled how their own mothers dressed them up and all the family paraded in their villages when they desired to display their wealth and achievement through personal belongings, as someone returned to the village. Referring to early independence years, Daisy's mother's sister (born in 1952) recalled with excitement:

30. When s women's hand was grasped by the chief it meant that he wanted to marry her. This was also a symbolic practice among commoners except that a family was not allowed to refuse a chief.

When my father returned [from Nkongsamba coffee plantations] he gave the mother a *pagne* for the work she did in the fields. She stitched a new *kaba* [indicating its volume with her hands] (from it). She was so happy when he bought my shoes and her bag, then on another day he would dress in his suit and we would walk displaying all this, everyone was looking, *e-kie*, this was so good. Like this everyone knew: You were someone!

Thus, *nyanga* was used by returning (or visiting) migrants, like itinerant traders, to gain recognition and position in the village hierarchies, to claim, build, challenge or sustain a reputation: you were someone, another grandfather used the same phrase recalling his return as a trader from Calabar (Nigeria) said. What connected different forms of *nyanga*—those within and outside marital/intimate economies—was that they generated attraction through the involvement of bodily sensations such as catching the eye through material qualities e.g. volume, sheen, brightness, contrast. That is, *nyanga* entailed the production of immaterial value—a certain allure (see introduction)—in a material way. The understanding of how the display of one's possessions entails the production of allure, that is, how it is aimed at generating certain feelings to achieve desired effects (cf. Gell 1988), as the following chapters will illustrate, continues to underpin young women's practices today.

In other words, material qualities were valued and considered to generate particular visual effects or allure that in turn could solicit attention and attraction and enchant by catching the eye; such as when volume that fattened bodies, scarification and layers of textiles literally enlarged one's physical presence, or when shiny, glowing bodies immediately distinguished one from others (Bayart 1986). The creation of this "aesthetics of prestige" (Rowlands 1994) materialised the achievement of the whole family: the fact that some items could be used and purchased (e.g. oil, scarification, dances, textiles) meant other more mundane needs were sufficiently fulfilled (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Learning ways to dance or to display shiny bodies or walk in voluminous textiles required particular embodied skills learnt through imitation in the intimacy of female kin away from men. Thus, these ways of doing *nyanga* relied on a particular of configuration between body and wealth wherein bodies were conceived both as individual and relational (Nyamjoh 2002, cf. Burke 1996). Such notions were reconfigured through the discourses of the church and state, an issue to which the following section turns.

Aesthetics of respectability

The early post-independence period (1960s–1970s) in urban centres such as Yaoundé and Douala was the time of the first beauty salons established by French, Greek and Lebanese people and which catered, I was told, to a foreign and local, wealthy and elite clientele.[31] Interestingly, the commodification of beauty that these early salons relied on was not widely considered problematic, perhaps hinting at how beauty had always been a form of trade—as it had indeed formerly been, with scarification, or dance apprenticeships at female associations, both of which were paid for (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Women belonging to Bene and Daisy's mother's generation however, recalled how, when they were newly arrived in Yaoundé to join their husbands, they could not afford to go to salons. Instead, like their mothers in the village, they would observe wealthy or elite women who did have the means, at the market or at the rotating saving and credit association meetings (see introduction). They would then try to imitate, for example, their hairstyles with other women of their own rank whom they met at the meetings. As such women of this generation reproduced the atmosphere of female sociality and intimacy that making beauty entailed and that continues—recall the atmosphere in the hair salon that Bene went to in the introduction—until today.[32] But if, unlike their daughters, many women could not afford visits to beauty salons back then, when they were young—pointing to the ongoing entanglement between beauty and hierarchy—they did have the opportunity, even then to be trained in the art of display in other sites. These sites included photographic studios, which they visited for their obligatory ID photographs (chapter 4), and sewing shops where they undertook apprenticeships or which (later) they ran themselves (chapter 3). These continue to be settings where *nyanga* is learned by young women today.

31. Some of these places, especially those situated in the wealthiest districts, had foreign men come in to beautify themselves. Thus, these salons questioned the concealment upon which the practices I described above as "arts/crafts of display/parading" and "theatrics of attraction" as well as their efficacy relied.
32. This would have been different among women who were born in Yaoundé, rather than those who arrived there in the context of marriage (where beauty practices would have been ideally paid for in the marital economy). However, none of my interlocutors of that generation was born in Yaoundé.



Figure 5. Example of a photograph taken to celebrate a dance association travelling from Mbouda to Yaoundé for a ceremony marking the first local member of the Cameroonian parliament. While the dress through volume connotes respectability for it covers the body, it also through volume of textile used connotes wealth. Wealth is manifested further through the radio and bag that women display. These were their personal possessions. Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (c.1973).

Furthermore, the art of display which these women had been trained in earlier by their female kin, and which they staged at periodic village markets, was now also staged on new occasions. State parades on national days provided new opportunities to stage a performance. Indeed, many female interlocutors in rural areas who belonged to Bene's mother's generation recalled how state celebrations were memorable occasions for them as members of village associations.

These occasions not only provided an opportunity to get new dresses stitched, but also to proudly display them as they could travel to Yaoundé and deliver performances in front of important audiences right on the central avenue of the capital. Moreover, these were exceptional occasions that warranted photographic studio visits beforehand (figure 5). As such the beauty work was integrated in context of the state events and the allure produced through embodied performance of dress harnessed for the production of allure of the state (cf. Tonda 2005, cf. Geschiere 2009). This continues in Bene's generation: even today, young women stitch their most complex and creative dresses to parade on Women's Day (8 March).

The period around independence was one of tight surveillance of appearance in the public space. Bodies were disciplined in the way they looked, as Mbembe memorably describes through an account of a teacher being forced to shave his beard to look respectable for the nation (2001:114). The early years of the rule of the first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, also saw an institutionalisation of a law controlling female dress (chapter 2). It encouraged women to be well groomed under threat of police fines, while state displays, and parades held on Avenue du 20 mai in Yaoundé, ritualised state demands as to what it means to dress properly and look good. The atmosphere of the Ahidjo period, in terms of instilling the disposition for surveillance of one's appearance, came across in the practices of Bene and Daisy's mother's generation. After finishing shopping, having tried on a dress or two, many women of that generation re-groomed themselves, using the plate glass shop windows as mirrors to comb their hair, before crossing the doorstep and returning to the public space. Expressions current today, as when the priest advises a new groom to pay for the bride's visits to Yaoundé's best beauty salons saying that "beauty is a female *duty*" resonates with the vigilance of one's body that was enforced in the early days of independent Cameroon.

While observation of others was part and parcel of making *nyanga* as the previous section illustrated, the sense of surveillance and duty in relation to beauty echoes mission, church and state-enforced practices. Recall from the previous section that Bene's father framed beauty practices also in relation to bodily cleanliness (Burke 1996, Thomas 2005). Having been schooled in the mission, he referred to Christian notions of personhood wherein a clean body signifies morality and where the body as flesh has to be hidden from view, especially female body given the immoral temptations it was imagined to elicit (chapter 2). In this vein, Daisy and Bene's mother in turn, recalled certain national shows screened at the cinema in Mbouda that advised how to wear different garments and how to tie the *pagne* to appear as a "respectable

African woman" through a dress style called *sanja* (figure 6). This style was considered appropriate to be worn to the church or to stroll in the market. She recalled how she, with other young women from her *quartier*, kept trying to attach *pagnes* in the way they were advised, and how the part that should be tucked behind one's waist kept falling out, as their bodies were covered by multiple layers of fabric.



Figure 6. *Sanja*, a dress style in which the *pagne* is wrapped around and tied around the waist in a specific way. Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (c. 1975)

Missions and the colonial state in Cameroon (e.g. Lawyer 2017, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999, Galega and Tumnde 2004), as in other parts of Africa and beyond (e.g. Burke 1996, Thomas 2006, Hunt 1990), had as one of their prime aims the construction of new subjectivities through practices of bodily and house cleanliness.[33] Women were imagined to have a "natural inclination" for domestic guardianship throughout the colonial era, and inculcating new dispositions related to cleanliness in them was seen as a promising means of disseminating them to others (ibid). This was part of the missions' disciplined teaching related to forming "good wives". Bene's mother recalled a government institution during the Ahidjo period which

33. The first missions to the coast of Cameroon were reported from 1888 (under German rule) and to the wider Grassfields area in 1912 (deLancey and Mokeba 1990).

verified cleanliness in urban compounds and homes under the threat of a fine. *Nyanga* thus, came to be (re)constituted as unrelated to display of one's own and one's kin's achievements and wealth, but rather to one's own morality displayed for example through bodily cleanliness.

Indeed, individual morality was to be indexed on female bodies in particular ways. Mougoué , for example, describes how in Anglophone regions in the early post-independence period (1960s), elite Christian men and women engaged in debates about what constituted proper cosmetic use for an imagined moral "African woman" (2019). In a similar fashion, my interlocutors recalled state-sponsored columns, for example in *Journal de Cameroun,* which encouraged ideals of "natural beauty" as appropriate for "African women", intertwining them with Christian respectability. What was proper for African women's cleanliness, according to these columns, was the temperate use of cosmetic products and restricting oneself to neutral lipsticks and nail polish (chapter 2). This in turn, was imagined as a part of being *cultivées or évoluées,* a point of distinction between urban (*filles ou femmes de la ville*) women and those from rural areas (*une villageoise)* or other city women who lacked "fashion" knowledge or who simply "are not fashion" (*être fashion*) (Cole 2004, Newell 2012, Masqulier 2013, Weiss 2009); a distinction that resonates with beauty hierarchies of the past and one which is in use today. Conversely, as noted for Cameroon and beyond (Mougoué 2019, Thomas 2008, Burke 1996, White 1990), what was seen as an excessive use of cosmetics was rebuked, considered "mere imitation of the West" associated with loosened norms, prostitution and loose sexuality.

As these discourses were explicitly directed only at women, they fostered an understanding of making beauty as a distinctively female domain. In other words, debating how to make only women, as Bene and Daisy's father put it, "pleasurable to see", journal columns promoted a gendered understanding of making beauty. This, in turn, was different to how *nyanga* practices—described in the previous section—were considered. *Nyanga*, recall, was available to both women and men but could be manifested in different ways (e.g. different scarification for men and women; men wearing suits, women wearing *pagnes*) and underpinned by gender separation and practices of concealment (Ferme 2001). If new manifestations of *nyanga* started to proliferate, they continued to be informed by older understandings. A friend of Daisy's mother, born in 1956, explained to me that the *nyanga* of young women I observed on the streets was nothing new and contextualised it in these gendered terms: "My father was already *nyanga*-ised, he worked as a cook for the Presidential Guard!" she said.

At the same time, however, other, often foreign, so-called *romans photo* (photo novels or magazines) circulated in the 1960s–1970s in Cameroon, from the French *Paris Match* to *Chasseur d'images* to clothing catalogues such as *La Redoute.* Through the images they contained, these encouraged the practice of beauty as an embodied skill. Whereas images were also attached to newspapers columns, these *romans photo* were filled with images at the expense of text. While my older interlocutors recalled that some of these images were an illustration of cleanliness, that is, state and church discourses, they equally spoke of other images these photo novels presented. The very term photo novel alludes to images telling a story or making the images speak. Such intertwinement of visuality and orality has been noted by Barber in case of praise poetry (2005). Therein, as Adeeko notes (2012), facts or material were converted into verbal pictures using material qualities, visual contrasts and juxtapositions to index something (for instance, a prince's dark skin might be an index of eminence). This, as we shall see, resonates with how aesthetics are used in fashion and photography today to create fame (chapter 3).[34] Today, one such *roman photo* is state-sponsored and contains advice about lifestyle, beauty and dress style. Not surprisingly, it is called *Nyanga.*[35] It provides advice on proper ways of doing *nyanga* and leading a *nyanga* lifestyle, encouraging women to develop this specialist skill by copying the glossy images filling its pages, allowing for crafting different stories about multiple selves.

In this vein, Daisy and Bene's mother and aunts recalled how they copied what they saw in the images circulating in these rare *romans photo* that came in their hands, and tried out different ways and styles. One such style, that appealed to many for its volume and cut, I was told was *pattes d'éléphant* trousers (bell-bottoms) which they saw on the cover of a music album by Nico Mbarga (figures 7 and 8). They vividly recalled how stitching such a style required all sorts of effort: posing in the way that Nico Mbarga does, discerning the right fabric that would hold stiff at the bottom even after being washed, persuading kin to fund travel to the tailor, or to borrow it from a friend from another school who already owned the rare and exceptional garment. It was an appropriate garment for a beautiful young woman to wear. While advice columns constructed the proper role of women as consumers of modern goods, thereby conjoining consumption, female respectability and leisure (chapter 2 and 4), one also had to learn the skills to create a desirable appearance, not by debating written advice but through

34. Adeeko (2012) writes how famous Malian photographer Malik Sidibe compared himself explicitly to griots pointing to similar conceptions that permeate creation of visual and verbal imagery that is, celebration and praise of achievements. For similar ideas see also Keller (2008).
35. The other is a newspaper, the *Cameroon Tribune*.

imitation and practice. This simultaneously questioned the distinction between work and leisure that the columns also implied—copying appearances was a skill, it entailed work and required apprenticeship.



Figure 7. *Pantalons pattes d'éléphant* (bell bottoms) for women (middle) and men (right) inspired by the album cover of *Let them stay* by Nico Mbarga (second image). Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (1980s)



Figure 8. *Le rockafillas* shoes inspired by Nico Mbarga and the Rocafil Jazz music band. Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (c. 1980s)

Thus, state-sponsored journals and *romans photos* articulated two perspectives on imitation. The state-sponsored columns, by referring to women's practices as "mere imitation of the West", framed them as a form of mechanical reproduction: imitation became devalued as a mere copy of an original. However, as women continued to copy the surfaces of the images circulated in *romans photos*, these practices promoted understandings of imitation in terms of valued embodied knowledge and skills, as in the "craft of display" that pertained to an "aesthetic of prestige". But, from the vantagepoint of imitation as mechanical reproduction, the "aesthetics of prestige" was seen as excessive use of cosmetic products and as bad taste, rather than a skill or a manifestation of achievement and wealth. It was reframed as something only a rural woman (*une villageoise*) would do: follow "village fashion" and apply products in "large" quantities to ensure she is visible and seen. By trying to define what Cameroonian female beauty and respectability should look like, newspaper discourses then as today not only established and essentialised the category of natural African beauty, but also configured femininity in terms of bodily essence by foreclosing an understanding of imitation as performative capacity (cf. Butler 1990, Ferguson 1999; see introduction). In doing so they fostered an understanding of female bodies as passive objects for the male gaze.

Thus, women growing up in the early days of the Cameroonian republic were confronted, and experimented, with different sets of aesthetics circulating in the public sphere that each carried somewhat different meanings. On the one hand, the aesthetics of respectability promoted by church and state discourses highlighted lightness, neutrality and encouraged body covering. This was premised on the idea that clean bodies index morality in individual terms and that one can read the morality of a person from their appearance, proposing notions of personhood underpinned by the dualism of an inner and outer self (cf. Lienhardt 1985). On the other hand the aesthetics of prestige, encompassing sheen, glow and volume, continued to be considered a manifestation of wealth and achievement (Rowlands 1994, Warnier 1993), speaking of bodies and moralities in both individual and relational terms (Nyamjoh 2002, cf. Burke 1994). Here, however, morality was not an issue of appearance, not least because the sources of the wealth and achievement could be concealed. What was displayed spoke both of the self and kin in terms of individual and collective achievements, the morality of which would be inquired about: after all, "one did not have oil everyday".

Certain qualities spoke towards both of these aesthetic regimes. Volume could be both a manifestation of an achievement, illustrated by layers of textile purchased and stitched, but

equally it satisfied the aesthetic of a Christian respectability by covering the body. Sheen and glow manifested excess oil and thus wealth but also satisfied Christian and state-sponsored discourses through an aesthetic of neutrality and transparency. This is well illustrated by Bene and Daisy's mother, born in 1955, who cheerfully recalled *nyanga* practices from her youth in 1970s in Mbouda. Growing up, she particularly fancied one hair and skirt style, which were both considered very successful in attracting young men:

> You would attach hair like this [demonstrates] so that it stands up. They would pull your hair like this, it hurts! But your head is full [creates volume]. … *E-kie*, not everyone could afford this, noooo! … Other *nyanga* was oil. If there was oil left from cooking, you could mix it with powder [camwood] and this would make your skin light … On Sunday I would walk in this manner [demonstrates] my skin would shine, I had a new dress stitched but not for school… Earlier, your mother will teach you the "manners" [the right way to behave/walk/carry yourself]… she does like this [performs] and you imitate her … this was to attract a man, your body clean, you shone, you are good, everyone would look! …. There was a style of a dress, *jupe poisson* [demonstrates the cut], that would make you walk slow like this [laughs]… you can wear it to youth celebrations at the school.

The *jupe poisson* (fish skirt) was a long tight dress with a bell bottom which, on the one hand, restricted mobility and movement but, on the other, compelled one to walk slowly and in a specific way called a "turtle" walk, thus enabling to deliver a longer *nyanga* performance. The length of this skirt satisfied Christian ideas of covering the body. Yet while this dress concealed the body, it revealed its shape—a particular aesthetic that was considered to steer attraction (Ferme 2001, chapter 2). Bene and Daisy's mother, like her own mother, displayed the family's wealth on her body: her skin shone and her dress was voluminous; and through this sheen and volume, the morality of her kin, and the well-being of herself and her kin was revealed, articulating chiefdom and village discourses on relational personhood. Her individual skills mattered too, for she was trained in display beforehand, and the fact that not many could afford such a hairstyle enhanced its uniqueness, rarity and attractiveness. But Bene's mother also interpreted her own actions in terms of cleanliness, articulating Christian notions of personhood, and read her shiny appearance in terms of individual morality and thus to neutrality or transparency. In doing so her narrative reveals morality as an interior essence, but also places it on the surface of the skin, calling into question the interior-exterior dichotomy discussed above (Warnier 2007). In the display of their bodies, therefore, the women of Bene's mother's generation worked to combine both an aesthetics of prestige and an aesthetics of respectability. Different aesthetic regimes were either seen as appropriate for different contexts,

as in case of *pattes d'éléphants* and *sanja* described above, or else resolved creatively through the display of unique styles (Guyer 1993) (chapter 3).

That is, the aesthetics of respectability and aesthetics of prestige were not only articulated in opposition to each other, they were intertwined through conceptions of morality and informed the ways in which young women embellish their bodies today (cf. Burke 1994). To be sure, the aesthetics of prestige elicited respect, as much as the aesthetics of respectability can elicit prestige (chapter 3) but this distinction speaks to a shift: from prestige on one hand, connoting wealth and achievement which is engaged through sheen, quantity and volume, to respect on the other, which entails not calling too much attention to oneself, not showing off, and connoting an interior moral self. But, because such aesthetic regimes were articulated with one another, they promoted an indeterminate relation between moral self and appearance. It is to these issues that the following section turns.

What beauty measures

Using no or little makeup could be a sign of poverty, Bene explained, engaging with the aesthetics of prestige discussed above. "If I put little lipstick on, it means I must be saving for other occasions as I don't have enough, perhaps I'm poor," she said, smearing her lips with several layers of shiny red lipstick matching her bag. She told me she learnt how to apply lipstick by watching YouTube videos at night. The previous day she had checked different shades of red appropriate for different contexts depending where you go to (*en fonction de lieu*), on the Facebook site of a fashionista living in "Paris the capital of fashion", referring to her as *Mbenguiste* as Cameroonians living in the West were popularly called. She explained in detail the different ways colours and fashions should be matched: doing *nyanga,* Bene instructed me, requires a cultivation of visual skills as well as investments in time and money. Bene borrowed *romains photo* such as *Vogue*, *Ebony*, *Nyanga* and the catalogues of textile companies such as Ivorian Uniwax or Dutch Vlisco from befriended sewing shops and learnt about beauty by copying images and adjusting them in her own way—"making them unique", she explained. She followed several websites and excelled in observing other people as she sat for long periods of time in the sewing shop, at her mother's market stand or outside her door. Looking in the mirror with pride, she fluttered her long eyelashes several times and concluded: "Look. Everyone does *nyanga* in some measure" (*chacun fait nyanga à sa mesure*), drawing

out the ongoing entanglement between beauty, wealth and hierarchy, as she put the last layers of lipstick to complete what she considered accomplished makeup.

Recall Bene's grandmother's accounts of scarification and its entanglement with rank, and of the use of cooking oil for beautification which not everyone could afford to smear onto the skin every day. Recall, too, Bene's mother's memories of not being able to visit beauty salons in Yaoundé during the 1980s when such outings were accessible only to the new elites. Furthermore, until the end of the Cold War, second-hand clothing was not imported to Cameroon. As such, avenues for engaging in beauty work were restricted. If today *filles androides* can invest in beauty products and spend time at hair salons, or have hairdressers and manicurists come for a visit at home, it is because cosmetics, nail polish, makeup kits, hair extensions and other items—including, importantly, android phones—became increasingly accessible from the 2000s onwards. The new millennium was also when trade accords between China and Cameroon were sealed and an influx of commodities, importantly including android phones, textiles and beauty products. Young and older women alike recognised that Chinese products came in different qualities, and while knowing the cheapest ones were not the best, stressed the importance of the increased, generalised, availability as encompassed through the common saying: "China allows everyone to be beautiful at least for one day". As such China was credited with the democratisation of beauty work, making it available for more than a wealthy few.[36]

At the same time the media was liberalised and new channels increasingly saturated urban screens, circulating diverse visual content which inspired young women to craft alluring surfaces (chapter 2). Bene explained as we were shopping at Marche Central:

> I see different stars wearing them [different hairstyles] on the TV in French shows, Brazilian telenovelas, but our local stars wear these too. Look at Mani Bela in *Pala-Pala*. Have you seen the Chinese [person] in the *quartier* the other day? This is similar to my haircut [pulling out her phone to look at herself in the mirror and then showing me the search she did for it]. When they walked like this [imitating it] they shine! Everyone does it "at their own measure" (à *sa mesure)*, it also depends where you go […] and it is not because you like the star that you will copy her, maybe you just like her dress, her hair or her looks.

36. Note how this resonates with the broader arguments in development studies that conceptualise China as an "alternative" to the West, crediting the former with the introduction of a "local democracy". Whereas the claim I quote throughout the thesis, that China allowed everyone to be beautiful at least for one day, speaks of an optimism about China-Cameroon relations, young women and their kin also showed ambivalence, as when the Chinese were seen as competitors in trade, stealing clients and making businesses fail. However, Chinese did not work as hairdressers, itinerant nail polishers or seamstresses at the time of my fieldwork.

> You can imitate your neighbour, maybe you spend long time thinking about it so that it becomes unique, your unique style that everyone wants to copy, this is the best! [clasping her hands] … I know they come from China and Dubai but Europe and US too. I don't know how it is in your place but here it is mainly urban women who wear them, although recently in the villages I have seen it too. But I would say women in the town are usually "more fashion" … wait …

She asked me to stop and entered a stand selling hair extensions that she usually frequented.

Thus, if in the past women observed chiefs' and notables' wives to imitate their styles, today it was the celebrities who flickered across Yaoundé screens that appealed to young women and served as sources of inspiration to craft their styles, be it hair, dress or posing. These images of feminine figures further enhanced the understanding of *nyanga* as a distinctively female practice and references to men doing *nyanga* among the young generation remained scarce. To be sure young women continued to have regard for the chiefdom but unlike their mothers or grandmothers, who lived in the villages or moved to Yaoundé for marriage, they were born in cities and rarely participated in chiefdom ceremonies. They returned to their villages in mainly for *funérailles*. Importantly, if celebrities and stars appealed to young women it was not because they came from the "outside" but because of a certain "allure of wealth"[37] and "allure of glamour" (Thrift 2008) that their styles—like the styles of chiefdom elites in the days of their grandmothers—conjured through their material qualities (cf. Dosekun 2016). It was because these stars and their styles caught their eyes and this was understood by young women not only in terms of a star's taste and visual skills but equally because they indexed the star's wealth and economic achievement, which was also something young women appreciated and aspired to achieve. That is, rather than indexing a desire to emulate the West, they indexed a certain success and fashion competence (chapter 3) wherein makeup, hairstyle or dress revealed not a simple appropriation or copying of others' looks through garments, but rather a visual and contextual skill of fashion literacy learnt as embodied knowledge that required work—through observation, socialisation, schooling and apprenticeship (chapter 3)—where imitation and innovation converged (Sylvanus 2016, Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014).

Following Bene into the stall, I found her holding four different hair extensions (*mèches*) in her hands: "These ones are Indian, these ones are Brazilian, and these ones … Nigeria [touching them]. The Brazilian and Nigerian are synthetic while the Indian, look, it says human hair, they

37. This itself can be taken as a criticism of the scholarship on personhood that saw it as a sort of never-ending dialectic of incorporation of that which came or is outside (e.g. Piot 1999).

are called natural. If you touch them you know these all are different qualities of hair … you choose what you prefer. Some are more stiff while others more soft, not all fit all hairstyles." She photographed all of them with her phone and left the shop. While she had decided which to choose, she explained, she wanted to doublecheck with her hairdresser if she could buy them cheaper (her hairdresser also traded in hair). When I asked Bene later to elaborate on her preferences in hairstyles, she took out her phone again to illustrate her reply through the collection of images she had downloaded and classified: "Look at times I do *rasta*, when I have money, like this [showing a photo] at other times I do a 'masculine haircut' (*la garçonnière*) [showing another photo]. Last time I did a Rihanna style [a short hairstyle that the singer Rihanna once had]. But at other times I like to leave my hair 'in the wind' (*laisser les cheveux au vent*) [pointing at her hair now]…. These are all different styles I make depending on the occasion. *Chacun fait nyanga à sa mesure.*"

Here, Bene did not speak of hair in binary terms, as fake versus natural or real, or in relation to copying whiteness or rejecting blackness, as Nyamnjoh and Fuh suggest occurs in the Cameroonian media (2014). Rather, she conceived of hair and hair extensions in terms of different hairstyles to be creatively arranged in terms of the desired looks depending on her desires and the occasion, and the feeling of those creative looks (figure 9). Such claims, which put the artificial and the natural on the same plane underscore that hairstyles are appreciated in terms of skills and creativity rather than simple dichotomies of natural and fake (Nyamnjoh and Fuh 2014, cf. Nyamnjoh et al 2002). Be it "human hair", "Indian hair", synthetic, or one's own hair styled with gel, it remains a stylisation of hair: hairstyles are considered a crafted surface. What is valued is the skill invested in a rare or unique hairstyle and the general allure that is achieved. If, as Butler argues, what makes gendered norms effective is how their relentless repetition obliviates their constructedness, and appears as unmediated reality (1990), here we see the opposite: the gendered boundaries formed through beauty practices are, at least partially, recognised, not as unmediated reality but as fabricated and made. The fabrication is therefore considered in terms of a crafted surface and fabrication of femininity and, by extension, appreciated not as bodily essence but as skill in crafting surfaces (cf. Butler 1990).

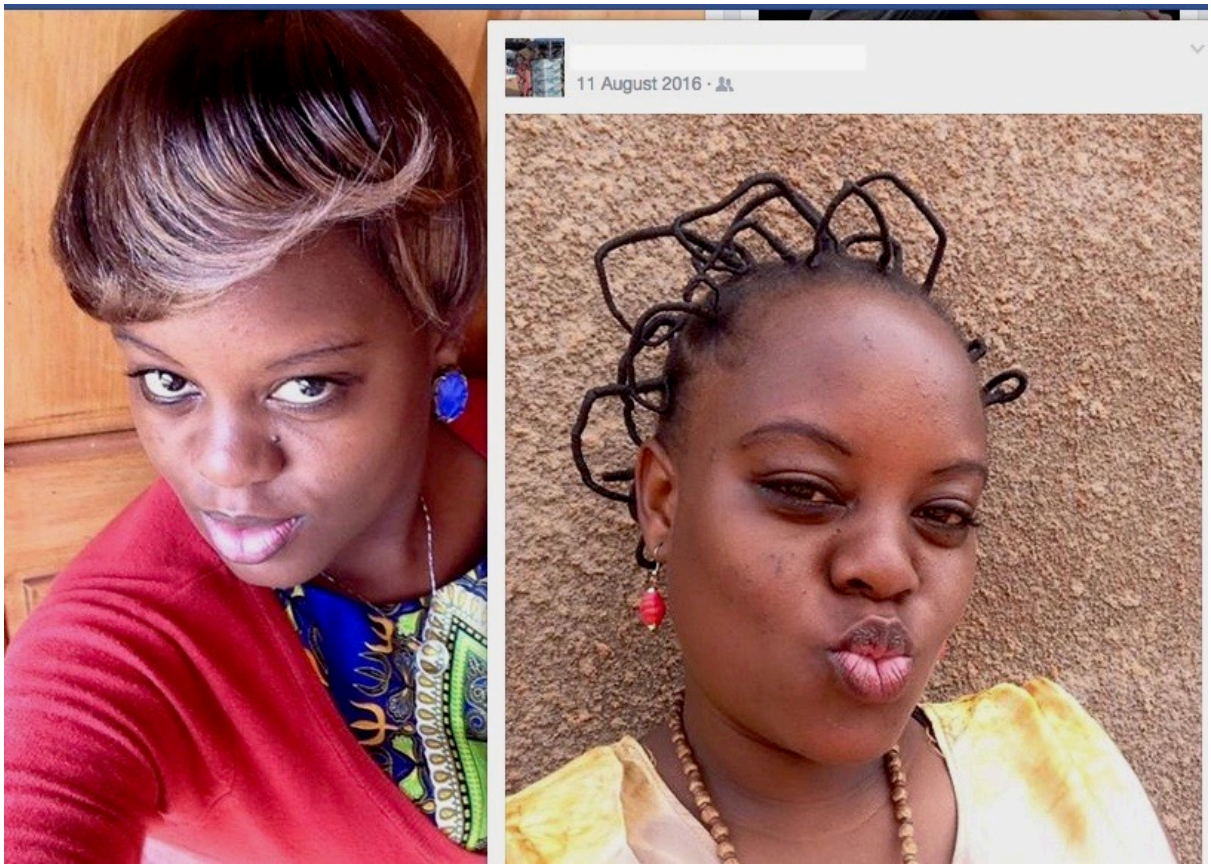


Figure 9: To the left, a "human hair" *garçonnière* style, innovated by making the fringe curl up. To the right, the style Bene's mother described from her youth reproduced today. Both displayed on Facebook. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2016).[38]

Crucially, with an android phone and its built-in camera one could not only browse but also capture images from fashion websites, follow fashionable figures and compile captured hairstyles, poses and dress styles from screens and photos taken of dresses while walking on the street into catalogues to circulate further (chapter 3). This was underpinned by the internet becoming increasingly affordable from the 2010s (in 2016, 10,000 FCFA per month could buy a daily data allowance of 1GB). The phone allowed young women to view an increasing number of images and take inspiration from them, and enabled them, through its camera, to further sharpen their embodied and visual skills, adding a new level of detail that young women could attend to by zooming in their phone camera, creating more complex and exact styles. Meanwhile, classification and cataloguing into albums allowed for the creation of personalised collections to be displayed or shared with others (chapter 3). The phone camera extended and multiplied the range of ways of doing *nyanga* and allowed women to broaden the range of inspiration and influence and to extend or circulate allure (chapter 3). The phone as an

38. I use this phrase to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.

indispensable and constantly present item also compelled young women to keep improving their skills (chapter 5).

The most basic android mobile phones were available in the market for 15,000 FCFA (20 euros in 2014–2016) and many young women carried the newest models with them on a daily basis and kept them in close proximity through the night. With this easy access to technology, going to the studio, calling for a professional photographer to come to their homes, or asking passers-by to photograph them, was potentially no longer necessary as android phones were equipped with two camera lenses, enabling them to take selfies, albeit in particular fashion (chapter 3). In this way, representations could be instantly made and circulated, as long as the phone could find the network and the battery was charged.

Mobile phones in Cameroon and beyond are important class markers and object of conspicuous consumption: these "new talking drums" are not only altering ways of communicating, being and relating (de Bruijn, Nyamnjoh, Brinkman 2009, Archambault 2017), they are also altering the gendered politics of production of visual representations. In doing so, they contribute towards more self-reliant mechanisms of beauty work as well as become new sources of its efficacy through concealment (Gell 1988, Archambault 2017). This is the case especially for women and youth. In Cameroon the production of photographic representations has long been a male domain. Historically, in Bamiléké Grassfields, the early production of figurative representations in the form of statuettes was confined to men. Older photographers often compared themselves to blacksmiths (*forgerons*), a profession that was also associated to men. The scarification that Bene's grandmother talked about was done by men (*odetala*). If, as Mbembe suggests, "having power to represent the reality (to make images, carve masks and so on) implied that one had a recourse to the sort of magic and double insight, imagination and even fabrication, that consisted in clothing signs with appearances of the thing for which they were the metaphor" (2001:145) we might consider how, through professions such as those of the blacksmith, carver and photographer, figurative representation is a male domain of power complicit in the formation of patriarchal Bamiléké chiefdoms and later—with photographic documentation and archival practices—of the Cameroonian state. Against this, android phones with built-in cameras afforded those who were excluded from the activity of "working with signs"— here young women—a possibility not only to author representations on unprecedented scale but crucially keep them in concealment in order increase their efficacy. While this unsettled the politics of visual representation described above, which are embedded

in patriarchal formations of chiefdom and state—young women at times admitted being burdened by the "duty" of having to make beauty to an increased degree on their own (chapter 5).

To be sure young women of Bene's generation also frequented beauty and hair salons that were frequented by their kin, or which were often owned by the members of one's village community or where such members worked. Indeed, the Hairdresser of Stars, where Bene had her hair styled in the introduction, was one such. It was her mother who recommended she go there, for it was run by the sister of a women she traded with at the market in the village. This had to do with the issues of quality, as young women said, since the skills of these professionals have been recommended or vouched for. It equally had to do with issues of trust for that particular hairdresser was embedded in a network of relationships with Bene's family. As many mothers and grandmothers originating from Bene's mother's village frequented this hairdresser, different generations met there and exchanged cues and advice about latest fashions of *nyanga* (chapter 3), reproducing the atmosphere of female intimacy, gossip and argument that older generations talked about.

However, some young women like Daisy felt that going to the same hairdresser as the members of your village community created the risk of having the same styles. Therefore, for example, young women tried out new or itinerant retailers of hairstyles other than the recommended ones, or ventured to newly-opened salons spotted on their journeys home, in order to increase their chances of having more alluring, unique and rare hairstyles. They concealed these styles from others (e.g. by photographing them and keeping the images stored on their phone rather than posting them on Facebook), be it kin or peers, in order to further increase their exceptional value, which allowed them to buy into social networks and reverse hierarchies (chapter 3). To be sure, because the democratisation of beauty enhanced competition it also compelled women to conceal their styles, achievements and skills (chapter 3 and 5). On the one hand, this could bring risks—from having one's scalp damaged by new products, to paying too high a price or else having one's hair extensions split. On the other hand, it opened up significant opportunities, such a gaining recognition among kin or respect from peers, and translated into other tangible benefits (chapter 2, 3 and 5). Thus, the commodification of beauty, rather than making beauty a personal/private investment, enhanced the social aspect of beauty, as the following chapters will illustrate.

As Daisy was proud of her new hairstyle she displayed it prominently through the slow way in which she walked and through the ways in which she arranged her hair to shine to make sure it was noticed by others. Once as she was about to leave the house her mother called her and verified how she had tied her hair. She double-checked Daisy's voluminous bun was nicely tight (*tiens bien*) and securely attached, and asked her daughter where she was going. Daisy reminded her that she was going to the university to check if there was an announcement about when classes would restart. Observing Daisy as she was leaving the house and walking slowly up the road, her mother sat on the doorstep and reflected: "Today's *nyanga* is very similar to the one of my youth. The difference is that if Daisy has such a voluminous bun, her extensions are artificial, and they are available everywhere, mine were natural and getting them was a rarer affair. But natural or artificial it is the same. You arrange your hair like this or like that [showing with her hands]. […] As young women do *nyanga* today they try the most complex styles, it can look messy (*désordonnée*). Ours [styles] were tidy (*ordonnée*)." This sense of tidiness, manifested through her checking if Daisy's bun was secure, resonated with the ways in which older generations were inculcated with the idea of cleanliness as a duty. But if today's styles were perceived as more messy, this was not conceived in terms of generational difference but simply as a difference in styles. Indeed, older women would also try these messy and complex styles.

Once Bene had done her makeup, we took our usual Sunday afternoon walk (*se balader*). around the *quartier*. Passing by a bar she spotted a woman sitting there and started to speak to me in a low voice. She must be new in the *quartier*, Bene said, and added that she had often noticed the woman was very well dressed: "Look, she must have spent 100,000 FCFA on her hair! Wow! see how many and how long her *rasta* are, like Charlotte Dipana, *he*! [pointing to the woman's voluminous, lengthy and dense hair] And the amount of *pagne* you need to stitch this, all the *froncés et pliés*? *Ekie*! And her makeup? [which was visible and "heavy"] Add her shoes, bag and jewellery! I see her like this e-v-e-r-y-day." Bene further elaborated that when someone wears too extravagant a dress, and dresses like this every day, or flaunts an expensive lipstick and beauty kit, "new day by day", it starts to be suspicious. However, she found the woman's appearance enchanting, and her eyes remained glued to her as we walked around the bar. "How come she manages to maintain such an appearance?" she asked herself in a lower voice as we turned in the direction of home.

When we got back to Bene's home, her father has gone to his bedroom and one of her brothers was sitting with Daisy in front of his computer. Bene hastened to tell Daisy about the woman we had seen. She described the woman's dress as a version of one worn by Rihanna and wondered which fashion blogs and websites that woman must visit to craft such a creative look, revealing how she considered this to be a skilful achievement. Daisy engaged with the valuation underpinning the aesthetics of respectability, pointing out that putting on such a dress is not very modest, especially if you are sitting alone in a city bar. "Why was she calling attention to herself like this?" Daisy asked, implying an association with wayward women that could easily spark suspicions of prostitution or involvement with undesirable networks of wealthy men. "You don't know where she took the money from! How come she can afford to be fashionable every day!" Daisy concluded: "*elle a mangé seule*" (she has eaten on her own)." This phrase, literally meaning not sharing one's food, also means not sharing one's money, implying individualism and greed, and questions morality alongside moral notions of personhood. If the aesthetics of beauty consumption index and materialise wealth and status in different and somewhat contradictory ways, this indeterminacy of meaning also provides an idiom with which young women could question the legitimacy of each other's, their kin's or peers' status and wealth, thereby also questioning hierarchies of status and rank.

As Bene and Daisy continued to be passionately invested in a detailed and expert description of that woman's looks, I asked their brother, Arnoux, what he would have made of that woman's appearance. He responded: "When I see young woman dressed like this I appreciate her looks. … Maybe she does not have money but if she managed to have an attractive look, she must have been able to for design a dress and apply makeup well! … They are young and beautiful but what will they eat tomorrow?" If not every young man would appreciate such looks, the young women's display could also be appreciated for its demonstration of the skills and knowledge to create a particular appearance and, as Arnoux's closing sentence suggests, her wit and courage to get money for such splendid looks in the first place. What was thus at stake was an appreciation of the mastery of visual surfaces as well as the navigation of social and economic networks in pursuit of goods. Another time Arnoux complained that when he saw a young woman who did not strive to be "pleasurable to see" he would not even start considering "observing her behaviour"—a common practice in considering someone a potential candidate for a "serious relationship", i.e. one ideally leading to marriage (chapter 2) – because it speaks of her as lazy. Thus, the monetary ways on which Bene commented on Daisy's hair in the opening vignette of this chapter, and on which Bene evaluated the woman

at the bar, were followed, implicitly or explicitly, by the question of where the money came from, hinted both at the risks associated with the morality of wealth but equally and importantly at the industriousness, cunning, creativity and visual and embodied skill creation that such a look might first require. In the post-Cold War era, where other paths for youth have partly failed, doing *nyanga* is not only the art of parading but, equally, the skill of getting by, highlighting how *nyanga* continues to materialise achievement of the whole family and/or of the individual self.

Young men's ideas about women doing beauty were best articulated at the meetings of students' associations which Bene and Daisy's brothers attended every weekend and which I also went to. I was struck not only by how many young people were present, but also by the absence of young women—out of 30 attendees each Sunday, usually only one to three were women. When I asked young men where the young women were, they often replied, smiling, at a hair salon. When I enquired further, the young men admitted that it would indeed have been good to have more female members. When I tried to question the men about spending time on beauty, one participant simply laughed: a woman should be pleasurable to see, this is also work! (*une femme doit être au moins agréable à voir, c'est du travail!*).

If "everyone does *nyanga* at some measure" then what was measured when looking at beautified bodies as they displayed themselves on university campuses, around Yaoundé's crossings, awaiting pickup by shared taxis, in the narrow alleys of the *quartiers* and in loud bars at night, was both monetary investment and the cunningness to obtain them, and the knowledge and visual skills that making beauty required—such as knowing what dresses to stitch, how to dress (chapter 2 and 3) and pose (chapter 4) and where—all recognised as forms of work. This in turn, echoes narratives of older generations about *nyanga* as embodied knowledge such as when dances revealed skills of women. It also complicates statements such as "women should be pleasurable to see" and "beauty is a female duty", that Bene and Daisy's father used above.

To be sure as young women are afforded new means in the form of android phones with internet access, cameras and many ways of editing and classifying, furthered objectification of female bodies as specular objects is encouraged.[39] This happens both through the images of femininity

39. Writing about Western visual regimes of patriarchal society, Berger argues: "men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at … the surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female: (1972:47).

that flicker on the screens, promising how body and beauty can bring about the investments one desires, and through the actual means that allow the self to become an image—the phone camera—but crucially, as young women use the screens of their android phones as mirrors. Drawing attention to the gendered dimensions of mirrors, scholars have argued that for women mirrors are not just a device for the formation of the self (Lacan 1996) but a necessary prompt for self-affirmation testifying to the internalised male gaze (de Beauvoir 1949, Berger 1974, Rocamora 2011). However, it is not only, I suggest, the appearance in the mirror that young women that this thesis describes affirmed their selves through; but rather the skills (or lack of them) that the appearance revealed, and that the self is made in view of generating pleasure and enchanting others (cf. Rocamora 2011: 415, cf. de Beauvoir 1949, cf. Berger 1974). Such skilful crafting of bodies for display articulates what Benjamin terms the "display value of commodity" (in Buck-Morss 1991, cf. Haug 1987), that is, drawing immaterial or affective value from appearance and looks, through an engagement of emotions and feelings that, as feminist scholarship has argued, characterises late capitalism (e.g. Illouz 2017, 2007). Thus, we see how young women's practices defy classifications in terms of resistance or reinforcement of patriarchal visual regimes (i.e. women as passive objects of male gaze) and in doing so complicate feminist critiques of the commodification of the female body under capitalist modernity (e.g. Felski 1995).

Indeed, the women belonging to the generation of Bene and Daisy's grandmother asserted it was, in their time, more often the husband and his kin who invested in a woman's scarification or dress after marriage. Investment in a wife's way of beauty was and is a sort of a payment, either as a part of bridewealth, or in return for female labour, procreation, or work in the fields, materialising marital/intimate economies.[40] More often than not, *nyanga* for the grandmothers' generation was perceived in terms of the recognition of their labour not by their own kin but by agnate kin. To be sure this is still desired by young women but for many is difficult to achieve given wider political and economic decay in contemporary Cameroon (see introduction, chapter 5). Young women marry later and marriages are postponed (chapter 5, conclusion) thus young women and their kin had to bear the economic burden of beauty work and invest in doing *nyanga*—buying beauty products such as makeup kits, skin lighteners and/or oil, paying for hairdressers and hair extensions, buying textiles and have them stitched, learning how to wear different dresses and making new images. As often only one sibling is

40. These investments and marital economies would be creating debt that ultimately can never be entirely paid (Pradelles de Latour 1991, see also Parker 2007).

privileged in such investments, not least as often family budget does not allow for more, the economic burden tend to fall on individual women themselves.

To be sure kin, when they can, aim to invest in young women's beauty too. Recall Bene's and Daisy's father neither criticised these practices nor treated them as vain. This contrasts to Mustafa's findings in urban Dakar (2002) where men regard these female practices in terms of vanity, reflecting the devaluation of embodied knowledge as mere copies, that we find also in church and postcolonial discourses in Cameroon. Young and older men, be it boyfriends or fathers, also invested in young women's styles, as the following chapters will show. However, these gifts, while desirable and valued by young women (chapter 5), according to them, were not given often enough. While in some cases they were kept secret (chapter 2) in others young women wanted to show those gifts to others, due to the commitment they demonstrated (Thomas and Cole 2009). One example of the latter is when Bene sold her android phone for 40,000 FCFA in order to buy herself a new garment made out of *wax* cloth and funded her own beautification for celebration of her graduation, telling all her kin present at this ceremony that it was sponsored by her *gars* with whom she was in a serious relationship. But as the following chapters will illuminate, young women also regretted this change in the demands—from economic to emotional—beauty work made on them and general physical and mental costs it implied (chapter 5).

Physical attraction was and remains important for courtship and marriage arrangements (cf. Ferme 1996) (chapter 5) because a fashionable appearance could substantially increase the brideprice on a competitive marriage market (cf. Nyamnjoh 2002, cf. Johnson-Hanks 2002). Moreover, the allure that beauty generates was considered to increase chances for a lasting relationship, best illustrated through a song sung at the "traditional" part of the marriage ceremony: "beautiful, beautiful, you will not be able to leave her" (*jolie, jolie, tu ne peux pas la laisser*). If young women went to such lengths to invest in beauty it was because this carried a promise of a return: an increase in the family's social standing should a daughter find a particularly wealthy and well-positioned suitor. Such investments can therefore be conceived of as an unrealised transaction animating economies of beauty. That is, if beauty work continued to reveal wealth in people (Guyer and Belinga 1995), the uncertainty of one's wealth, economic and social, was managed, as the chapters will show, by accumulating the individual's own "wealth in prospects": "keeping options open, maintain possibilities, keeping flexible, and then being ready to pounce when a promising chance comes along" (Johnson-Hanks 2018:331).

These shifting economies of beauty in Cameroon, in turn, reflect and partake in a decaying economy, falling marriage rates and unemployment which, amongst others, rendered young men unable to act as suitors who could offer gifts in courtship, let alone afford a brideprice, and their kin unable to help. As such they reveal changing generational and gender dynamics in intimate relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how visual-self fashioning has been practiced across generations, with particular attention to the configurations between notions of beauty, morality and wealth. To do so, it first analysed the semiotics of beauty to show how it is conceived as an embodied skill and knowledge pertaining to female socialisation in view of exercising attraction. *Nyanga* encompasses bodily techniques of cleaning, dressing and walking which could be termed arts of display or skills of parading underpinned by performative capacity (Ferguson 1999, cf. Mustafa 2002, cf. Groes Green 2013). While *nyanga* is geared to achieve effects on others by exercising attraction, capturing attention and thereby enhancing one's presence, it equally creates feelings of pride and pleasure for the self as "one's body is well".

The second section analysed how the grandmothers of today's young women practiced beauty. It showed that, in that older generation, beauty pertained to a particular marital economy as female bodies were decorated with gleaming oil, scarification and other means, often in recognition of their procreative capacity within bridewealth exchange or in return for their labour in the fields (cf. Ongum 1963, cf. Bohannan 1956, Boone 1991). If everyone could potentially learn *nyanga* from their female kin, not everyone had enough oil or could pay for scarification or, later, for textiles and bags. Thus, display materialised achievement and was used to maintain or challenge hierarchies while embellished bodies materialised and moralised kin's wealth (Rowlands 1994). Visual attraction was underpinned by an aesthetics of prestige which highlighted material qualities such as sheen and volume, underpinned by relational notions of personhood (Nyamnjoh 2002) and was equally a male practice.

In the third section, I showed how the ways in which bodies were beautified altered with the church and state discourses and practices aimed at the generation of the mothers of the young women this thesis focuses on. This section showed how the discourses of the state at

independence embedded Christian notions of personhood wherein female bodies are conceived in individual terms but as displaying the morality of individual and internal actions, i.e. indexical fashion. In this vein, newspapers at the onset of independence framed beauty as distinctively female domain, fostering an "aesthetics of respectability" (Mougoué 2019, Thomas 2006, Burke 1996) in which qualities such as "naturalness" and "temperance" are valued. At the same time images circulating in foreign magazines and local newspapers were viewed, examined and copied thus sustaining an engagement with beauty as an embodied skill. Yet as these new configurations, speaking to an aesthetics of respectability emerged, they did not displace, but were merely added onto the existing repertoire of visual skills of display alongside the aesthetics of prestige. Both informed an intense over-investment in the skin (Warnier 2007) that underpins visual self-fashioning among young women today.

With the increase in the accessibility of commodified beauty from China for young women today, in the fourth section I showed how these different regimes of beauty valuations continue to inform the ways in which young women beautify their bodies and make judgements about others' beautified bodies. Answering the main question of this thesis, about what visual self-fashioning does and affords women to do, this section shows how android mobile phones have offered possibilities of visual representation to women and extended both the possibilities and the burdens of beauty work to young women in particular. This work today makes increasing economic and emotional demands on young women, and reflects falling marriage rates and male unemployment, pointing to a reconfiguration of gender relations, particularly in intimate relations.

Whereas this thesis argues that visual self-fashioning objectifies female bodies for the male gaze but is also a set of valued skills, this chapter provides historical grounding for this main thesis' claim. It traces how beauty was considered a form of embodied skill geared to produce certain feelings in the self and other, and how this informs understandings of young women's self-fashioning today. By examining beauty in terms of visual skills and bodily knowledge, the chapter has also offered a new approach to scholarship on beauty in Africanist anthropology (e.g. Popene 2004, Dosekun 2017) and beyond (e.g. Jarrin 2017, Edmonds 2010) revealing how it can be a valued form of work. In drawing out how beauty work continues to be a display of wealth-in-people but entails a reconfiguration of social relations that underpin it—from kin and community to friendships sustained over social media, music stars and other celebrities,

dressmakers and so on—and involves higher economic pressures on individual woman, this chapter serves as a backdrop to the practices described in the following chapters.



Figure 10. The young woman knew she would meet a certain young man while passing by a particular area and purposefully decided not to wear a *sexy style* so as to discourage his interest in her. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016).

TWO:

Fashioning seductiveness

It was late evening when we returned to Manuela's home after a walk (*une balade*) she had suggested to entertain ourselves (*se distraire*). A few moments after we entered, she disappeared and came back having changed her outfit. Now she wore a denim miniskirt which revealed her legs sheathed in tights, and a string-top which showed her arms, shoulders, chest and waist. Such dress styles, called "sexy" had become a target of a recent governmental campaign (November 2013) called Back and Belly Outside (*Dos et Ventre Dehors* or DVD) and, later, Belly and Ass Outside (*Ventre et Cul Dehors* or VCD). The acronyms—DVD and VCD—evoked the association of these styles of dressing with "modernity" and commodity. The campaign aimed to "sanitise dress norms" (Le Soir, 2014) it deemed immoral, such as sexy

style, especially among young women (figure 11). I asked Manuela if she would dress in sexy style to go out. She replied: "When you dress DVD [sexy] you are seen as *fille légère* (promiscuous girl). It's very rare that I dress DVD. Even when I'm tempted, I resist (*je me retiens*). Rather, it is limited to my room. If you want to be respected, you should first respect yourself," she concluded and sat in front of a computer murmuring a song. As the sounds struck a familiar chord, I asked: "Is this Beyoncé?" She nodded and continued to browse Facebook in search of new dress styles. The song I referred to was Beyoncé's "Partition". It was not only being played across snack-bars, clothing shops, music stands and *boites de nuit* in Yaoundé; it was fervently discussed by my young Bamiléké female interlocutors because of how Beyoncé—a star most liked and some admired—exposed her almost-naked body, which they read as an expression of her sexual desire.[41] "Could we watch that videoclip?'" I asked. "If you want," she responded hesitantly. Manuela turned on the video and now enchanted by the screen kept on singing the song. Yet just over halfway through the song she stated, "It can enter into you," and abruptly stopped the video.

This vignette well expresses the attitudes of my young Bamiléké female friends regarding ways of dressing. On the one hand, young women like Manuela, a recent graduate in communication, wanted to evoke respect through their dress styles. On the other, they embraced sexy style in order to attract men. Thus, sexy style procures pleasure but at the risk of losing respect. These associations highlight a conflation of dress with female sexuality (Hansen 2004) which goes back to the arrival of the first missions to Cameroon at the start of the twentieth century, and thread through colonial and postcolonial state formations (Coly 2015). In doing so they constitute the female body as the central rhetorical element of postcolonial nation-state modernity (Coly 2015, Tonda 2005, Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Hodgson and McCurdy 2001) and commodity capitalism, a recent example being the DVD-VCD campaign. Such discourses also seek to legitimate the equation of aesthetic and moral values along the "aesthetics of respectability" as discussed in the previous chapter.Taking as a cue Manuela's desire to be respected and the allure of Beyoncé's sexualised female body that enchanted her, in what follows I explore how young Bamiléké women in Yaoundé used popular dress styles as a visual strategy to fashion seductiveness within contemporary norms of female respectability.

41. Most young women noted their preference for "stars" with a similar skin tone to the American singer Beyoncé, consciously referring to the mixing of whiteness and blackness that it evokes. Rather than interpreting this as the appeal of figures from the West or "outside", this preference was further interpreted in terms of wealth and power related to the economic success, cosmopolitanism and creativity of stars' styles, who also included local celebrities such as Lady Ponce, Charlotte Dipanda, Coco Argente and Mani Bella.

Much of the literature on dress and its relationship to sexuality in Africa analyses it from a semiotic perspective (e.g. Allman 2004, Hansen 2004, Tamale 2015). This line of scholarship, often influenced by Foucauldian (Hansen 2004) and feminist readings of sexuality (Tamale 2015), denounces patriarchy and the male gaze as circumventing the female "right to dress" and, by extension, "disciplining" the female body and sexuality. In this vein, for example, Hansen's analysis of mini-dress laws in Zambia (2004) and Tamale's account of mini-dresses in Uganda (2015) show how such legislation turns female bodies into indices of the patriarchal nation-state and how women grapple with such restrictions. While similar concerns are reflected in the realities that young Bamiléké women inhabit, such accounts often view dress as disabling and foreclosing female agency; as something that women are victims of or should resist (Nyamnjoh 2004).

Recent approaches to female sexuality have focused on sensuality and eroticism to move beyond such binaries of empowerment versus resistance and of patriarchy versus normative orders, to tease out female sexual agency amidst patriarchal regimes, and how it articulates its own logics and defies binary classifications altogether (Arnfred 2014). While not referring to dress specifically, Mustafa's account from Senegal (2006) and Tamale's on erotic practices in Uganda (2005) draw on Audre Lorde's (1993 [1978]) argument that the erotic has the power to foreground how the sensuality of the female body and serves women's relations with other women, that is, outside heterosexual sexual practices. Arnfred, in turn, shows how such sensual and erotic practices are learned through ritual and in everyday socialisation across generations of women in northern Mozambique (2014, 2004), proposing terms such as "sexual capacity" to account for these practices. Groes-Green's work on *curtadoras* in urban Mozambique takes such arguments further to show how erotic practices are embedded in wider networks of female exchange (2013). While Groes-Green (ibid.) does not highlight the senses as such, his account moves beyond the binary of empowerment versus resistance, and teases out female spaces of assertiveness where women have power over men, without celebrating female agency as potentially overthrowing entrenched gender and economic inequalities.

This chapter approaches questions of dress and sexuality from the perspective of eroticism and bodily sensations that recent studies in sexuality have foregrounded (see also Spronk 2014). Doing so requires a shift from understanding dress as disabling to dress as enabling, bringing female agency to the fore without celebrating it as either transgressive or empowering. This approach entails starting from the body and focusing on corporeal experience of sexuality—

the sensuous body—through the lens of the materiality of dress, i.e. how sensations are materially produced (Hansen and Madison 2013). In doing so the chapter fills gaps in the scholarship on dress and sexuality respectively. In the former, as Entwistle (2001) points out, while the body is central to dress, there is surprising lack of analysis of the relationship between them. In the latter, Spronk (2014) writes, sensations are key to understanding sexuality as bodily—and, in my case, also visually—experienced, a focus that current literature lacks.

The chapter starts by contextualising the current campaign in a historical trajectory to show how state discourses about female dress work to legitimate and normalise particular ideas about female sexuality and proper womanhood. The ways in which young women today negotiate female dress styles—and thus their sexual agency in public spaces—in the light of the campaign is taken up in the second section. This section shows how such negotiations involve efforts to discipline one's own desires in a quest for respect, making temperate use of seduction and pleasure. If such efforts resonate with the sexual norms reinforced by the government's campaign, the following section shows how young women equally fashion alternative ideas through dress. Section four looks into the fashioning of seductiveness as an embodied skill to show how young women make and wear dress not only to enchant but also to disenchant the other (figure 10) and the self, and how, in doing so, dress allows them to accumulate wealth in men.

Furthering the broader argument that beauty work consists of embodied skills and knowledge that generate sensory effects, this chapter argues how such sensory effects are materially produced, amounting to technologies of (dis)enchantment.

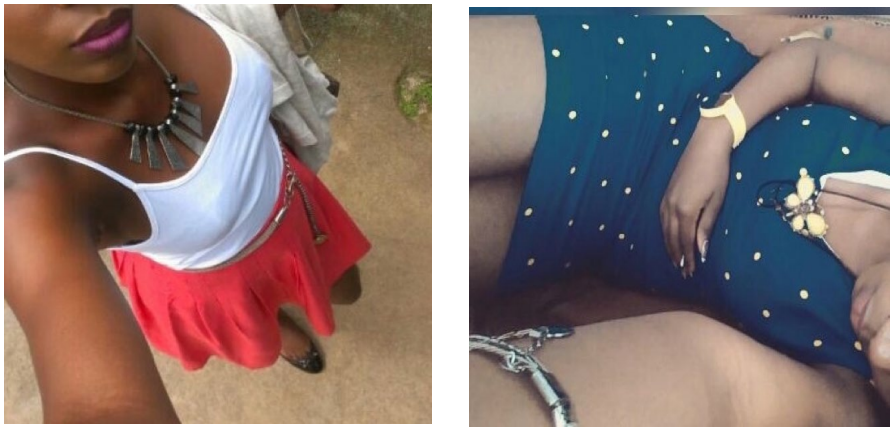


Figure 11. Sexy styles in 2016. Usually garments that reveal tighs and arms and hug the body (*moulant*) are considered sexy. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2016)

The campaign



Figure 12. Kaba dress in 2015 (similar cut to the dresses from ca. 1973 shown in figure 3). Note also the similarity of the items displayed, i.e. the bag and hat, and the voluminous textile, to the ones in figure 3. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

The state's DVD-VCD campaign was launched in November-December 2013 under the joint patronage of the Ministry of Woman and Child and the Ministry of Youth. Opposing the immoral influences from "outside" circulating in popular culture and indexed in short and tight sexy styles (figure 11), the campaign equated what it saw as local, i.e. Cameroonian and African garments such as *kaba* (figure 12) and *sanja* (figure 6), with female respect.[42] *Kaba* and *sanja* are usually made out of *pagne* and are amply cut and modelled on priestly vestments (Mokake 2010), thus equating respectability with the concealment of female bodies and, by extension, female sexuality. This, in turn, echoes the nation-state's constructions of respectable

42. While some versions of these garments are associated with women in rural areas, so-called more complex or more elaborated versions (e.g. *kaba compliqué*) are seen as appropriate for "urban villagers".

femininity through beauty at the time soon after independence, as described in the previous chapter. These styles also referenced precolonial ways of doing *nyanga* insofar as beauty was related to wealth and achievement, and manifested through volume, bigness and largeness, that is, the "aesthetics of prestige" (chapter 1). Recall from the previous chapter that back and belly were body parts invested with erotic signification through scarifications as well as surfaces on which to display one's wealth and achievements be it through the surface that scarification covered or through the volume of dress. By calling to conceal these bodily parts the campaign both reiterated these meanings and resignified them, in terms of private parts to be hidden from view alongside Christian notions of personhood.

The DVD-VCD campaign evoked mixed responses, ranging from support from old and young alike, who saw it as a legitimate means of regulating the public space, to condemnation, especially from young women and men who saw it as a challenge to their "right to dress", i.e. their autonomy, interpreting it as yet another political strategy to divert popular attention from the real economic and social problems in Cameroon. As one male friend said, referring to a rumour that district council officials could pull down a skirt if it was too short as it was not hiding anything, "the government has stripped you of all chances, now it strips you of your own clothes" (see also the newspaper articles discussed below). The press reported scenes from across Cameroon of women being fined and, if they or their kin failed to pay the fine, being detained at police stations. Independently of the views that young women held about the campaign, the main reason many did not wear sexy was fear of confrontation with the police. These fears were evoked as much by memories of previous experiences (Amin 2012, Nyamnjoh, Nkwi and Konings 2012)[43] as by the contemporary context.

43. I refer here to the 2005–2006 and 2008 strikes and protests at the university (Nyamnjoh, Nkwi and Konings 2016). When I started fieldwork in 2013 these were still vivid in the memories of the young women I worked with, often evidenced through their immediate freeze when special forces, notably BIR (Bataillon d'Intervention Rapide) and GP (Garde Presidentielle), appeared in our surroundings. Young women were also not oblivious to two other periods characterised by violence: *villes mortes* (1991) and the *maquis* or UPC rebellion (1958–1970) (Deltombe at all 2012).



Figure 13. Mini-dresses in the 1970s. Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (1970)

Attempts to control female bodies in the public sphere through particular ways of regulating dress are not new in Cameroon, on the continent and beyond (e.g. Tamale 2015, Hansen 2004).[44] The contemporary DVD-VCD campaign in 2013 extended and cemented the focus of the regime (1960–1982) of Cameroon's first president, Ahmadou Ahidjo, on disciplining female dress and bodies. Under Ahidjo the 5 December 1974 law (article 7) entrusted the safeguarding of "moral decency" to mayors and police who could impose punishment on what to their eyes appeared as compromising such principles e.g. young women wearing "indecent" dress—a law which is still in force today (Ndjio 2005). Older interlocutors recalled how short, tight mini-dresses, as well as body-hugging long skirts—the *jupe poisson* alluded to by Bene's mother in the previous chapter —which revealed the shape of the body whilst concealing the body itself were kept under surveillance during the Ahidjo regime (figure 13).[45] While further consolidating the patriarchy at the core of the visual regimes of the Cameroonian postcolony (Mbembe 2001), the introduction of the law fostered a disciplining of female appearance in

44. Similar laws on regulating dress in general, and referring to miniskirts in particular, have been noted in Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi and Uganda, amongst other countries, in the late 1960s and 1970s (Hansen 2004).
45. I was told of similar episodes during the late 1980s when young women would dress in miniskirts and "fish dresses" (long, tight dresses) risked being stopped by the police because of the shape or parts of the body these garments exposed.

public space, in ways that resonate with young women's practices today (chapter 3). Thus, the campaign reinstated early postcolonial state discipling of female appearance as a central element of postcolonial rhetoric.

However, the way in which the early postcolonial state attended to female bodies was not in itself not "new"; rather, the early postcolonial state extended colonial practices and obsessions with the naked female body. In doing so it bore witness to what Coly (2015) aptly describes as the "spectral postcolonial life of the colonial rhetorical statement of African female nakedness" pointing out how female bodies in particular became sites of colonial transactions (2015: 23, Bernault 2019). Scholars have documented the colonial obsession with the naked female body that had to be dressed, thus producing the category of the "immoral naked body" on the African continent (e.g. Tamale 2015, Coly 2015, Stoller 1995, Burke 1994, Thomas 2005). In Cameroon specifically, obsessions with clothing "African female nakedness" is evident in early accounts of the German presence in the port of Douala. Such accounts document efforts at managing naked bodies, for example those serving in colonial homes (Lawyer 2015). The proper clothing of nakedness was also seen as disciplining and cleaning "dirty black bodies" by Christian, Protestant and Baptist missions in the Grassfields which promulgated ideas of cleanness and domesticity as essential for women (Bowie 2003, Weber 1993).[46] The DVD/VCD campaign thus reflected and rehearsed continuities in the ways in which the early postcolonial state extended older colonial anxieties about female nakedness.

Alongside these continuities, the contemporary DVD-VCD campaign also reflected the shifting post Cold-War rhetoric about the commodification of female bodies under contemporary capitalism. In the early postcolonial period, the unclothed female body continued to figure centrally in state discourses and practices, while the post Cold-War rhetoric, as exemplified by the campaign, underscores what Tonda argues is central to the exercise of state power in Central Africa today: the female body's commodification in the capitalist market (2005). To be sure commodification of female bodies and sexualities is not new given the history of precolonial systems of exchange, wealth and value wherein reproductive sexuality was a form of commodified sexuality related to wealth-in-people (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Indeed, the campaign by turning a blind eye to these precolonial forms of exchange, where reproductive sexuality was transactional, implicitly recognised and sustained them (Bernault

46. Women of higher rank often worked with missionaries to educate women of lower rank.

2019). Instead the transactional sexuality in its commodified form of prostitution was qualified as unproductive, condemned and opposed to reproductive sexuality which was deemed non-commodified. This new distinction between commodified and reproductive sexuality was a colonial one and related to the introduction of capitalist economy and wage labour (White 1991). Thus, the campaign (re)instated the female body as a central rhetorical element not only of the nation-state but of contemporary commodity capitalism (Tonda 2005, cf. Coly 2015).

By alluding to DVDs and VCDs as commodities, the campaign, through the newspaper articles such as "*Stop au Dos et Ventre dehors"* (DVD**)** in the journal *Le Soir* or more punchily, "*Assainissement des mœurs vestimentaires: La prochaine déculottée des autorités administratives*" in the journal *L'Anecdote*, TV and radio programmes such as one tellingly called *Déviances* on national CRTV, metaphorically implied that female bodies that engage in enchanting spectacles, generating attraction, dressing in sexy styles, are replaceable and reproducible commodities (Tonda 2005, Bernault 2015). It was considered that "internet, television channels and new technologies from overseas" but also some local stations were circulating "the images that are outrageous to decency" that were "coarsely copied by our own people under the fallacious pretext of standardisation" (*Le Soir*, 2013). The outrage was such that one female minister was reported to have covered her eyes with a scarf in order to not see an "indecent spectacle" delivered by a local artist Lady Ponce at a state celebration (*L'Anecdote*, 2013). Such spectacles, it was further suggested, were motivated by a desire for pleasure which was considered problematic, especially for women, and most often encouraged prostitution. Furthermore, by equating ideas about commodification and female sexuality with the "declining European civilisation" (*Le Soir*, 2013) the campaign inverted the colonial hierarchy and placed respectable Cameroonian women at the top, imputing moral backwardness to the West for a lack of chastity which was connoted by particular arrangements of garments, i.e. tightness, rather than specific items of clothing. Echoing Christian notions of morality and personhood underpinning the "aesthetic of respectability" (chapter 1), by revealing bodily shapes and naked body parts visually, sexy style established female bodies as sexualised.

At the same time, by calling for the belly and the womb (*ventre*) in particular to be concealed, the campaign foregrounded reproduction as the only legitimate discourse on female sexuality required to sustain respectable womanhood and, by extension, reiterated that motherhood is the respectable social role for a Cameroonian or African woman. Thus, the campaign echoed other

official discourses—including rhetoric on HIV and AIDS or village discourses on "threats to the womb" (Feldman-Savelsberg 1997, Thomas 2003)—that framed female sexuality outside procreation as problematic (Spronk 2011). The campaign, by aiming to regulate female dress in public space, further suggested a dichotomy of exclusive regimes of female sexuality. On one hand there was legitimate reproductive sexuality, expressed through the concealment of one's body, ideally with a *kaba* or *sanja* (figure 12 and 6). On the other hand there was commodified sexuality, evoked by other forms of dressing, especially sexy (tight and short garments), which alluded to prostitution, to which desire for sexual pleasures was confined (Cole 2006, 2010, White 1991, Hodgson and McCurdy 2001, Hunter 2010).

Furthermore, by referring to young women's autonomous choices in dress style, the DVD-VCD campaign implied a division between notions of personhood that, on the one hand, see the female body as reflecting social value for kin and the lineage (i.e. in relational terms) and, on the other hand, as reflecting individual selfishness and gain, which come from "outside", as luring young women onto a quest for external beauty, ease and pleasure (Tonda 2005, Bernault 2015, cf. Galland 2016). As such, the campaign played on generational divisions, reiterating a discourse—common among elites and elders—of troublesome youth led astray by modernity, the West and capitalism on, as stated in a presidential address on Youth Day (2016), "the unbridled quest for easy profit and wealth is a road to perdition that should be shunned by the youths". Instead elders were positioned as gatekeepers of "tradition and morality" and "proper reproductive sexuality", rehearsing the entrenched hierarchies of gerontocracy and patriarchy permeating the structures of the Cameroonian state, Bamiléké chiefdoms and the church. It is here that we contend with Coly's arguments about how anxieties about the state become anxieties about female bodies resulting in "the predictable and sometimes pathologising interpretive grid of negotiations of tradition and modernity, globalisation and postcolonial patriarchal anxieties, or again African societal uneasiness with the growing socioeconomic autonomy of women" (Coly 2015:12, Hodgson and McCurdy 2001).

Thus, on the one hand, young women who dressed sexy could be perceived as seeking selfish pleasures, associated with prostitution and making their bodies into DVDs—"mere commodities for exchange". On the other hand, displaying one's body in a sexy dress was meant to fashion seduction, because it was part and parcel of *nyanga* (chapter 1)—the bodily and visual skill procuring pleasure for the self and the other, generating attraction and considered desirable both by young women and their kin. By regulating dress, the campaign

regulated *nyanga* and female sexual agency in the public space (Arnfred 2014), an issue to which the following turns.

Risky pleasures

One afternoon, Manuela's sister, Stella, was wearing sexy at home while doing household chores. She went out to buy some spices from a neighbourhood stand located two blocks away and felt, she said, too "lazy" to change her attire, qualifying wearing sexy as an excuse (too lazy to change clothes), rather than in terms of active desire. The excuse took away some of the responsibility of being seductive in public and shielded her somewhat from the moral repercussions that come with deliberate wearing of sexy dress. Other young women I worked with, as we shall see below, spoke of wearing sexy in public in more active terms. Upon Stella's return, I asked how she felt about going out in this kind of dress. She replied:

> When you wear sexy it makes you feel seductive (*ça te fait sentir séduisante*), you are passing and men are looking at you, they are appreciating your look. These are pleasures of the body! (*mon corps est bien*) You are *nyanga*! …. It feels awkward to walk and not being looked at. When you walk dressed like this [pointing to my loose linen trousers and T-shirt] no one looks at you, how do you feel? It is up to a woman to seduce, right? Else how will you attract *un gars* [guy]?[47]

She returned to cooking the meal for which she now had the missing ingredients.

Later, during the meal, Stella explained further that revealing the sexualised female body is pleasurable in itself; many young women wear sexy at home and explained that they "do beauty for oneself". This notion that sexy style is something private to be done alone at home should be both seen in terms of pleasure it procures for the self and a form practice or training. For example, Stella told me how once she wore a particular sexy style at home trying out different ways of dancing and walking in front of a mirror on the day she was going out to a nightclub and felt more confident about her movements. This notion is also a part of complex impression management. Claimed as a private act its success lies in being seen—both literally and being-seen-to-be-attempting-concealment, speaking to the aesthetics of concealing with which

47. "*Quand tu portes sexy, tu te sens séduisante, tu passes, les hommes te regardent, ils t'apprécient. Ce sont les plaisirs du corps! Ca fait bizarre quand tu passes et personne te regarde. C'est à la femme de séduire! Tu vas attirer le gars comment?*"

seduction and efficacy of beauty work was invested (chapter 1). Thus, it is also a visual strategy to "catch" (*attraper*) and "keep" (*garder*) a husband or *un gars* (chapter 5). She told me that you know if you are attracting attention if your look is commented upon or congratulated, while the attraction of a man is confirmed through his request for your phone number, but only if he asks later, because that means that he has already been observing you. Usually, she continued, if you are asked too soon, it means that a *gars* did not observe you long enough and his interest is not "serious", i.e. he is not interested in a longer relationship entailing affective, sexual and economic exchange and ending in marriage (chapter 5). Likewise receiving flattering and formulaic messages too soon means that the *gars* who was "caught" might not be "serious". However, this did not mean one would not use his interest for other benefits, economic and/or affective, Stella concluded.

Young women like Stella stated that the embodied performance of sexy style engaged and elicited her feelings of being seductive, of being able to express erotic desire and solicit desire from the gendered other. Displaying female sexual agency was associated with the pleasures of the body (*mon corps est bien*), the pleasure of being appreciated and looked at, feeling admired and a particular skill of being able to express and solicit enchantment and erotic desire, that practices of doing *nyanga* entailed. This was particularly important given the contradiction young women and men experienced in trying to follow their own desires in choosing partners whilst also obeying their kin's wishes when it came to making that choice (introduction, chapter 5). Thus, claims such as Stella's point also to a form of visual agency enabling personal choice when determining a partner in intimate relationships (cf. Cole and Thomas 2006, chapter 5), while the enjoyment of wearing sexy to catch a *gars* speaks to the pleasure experienced therein.

Whereas Stella went out in sexy dress during the day, though for short periods, other young women I worked with were less ready to take risks and tried to remain within the home or compound when wearing sexy styles. Manuela, for example, cautiously revealed her visual strategy to seduce a neighbour. As the eldest sister, she did much of the housework—cooking, washing clothes and doing dishes—which took up much of her time and kept her from leaving the compound. She carried out these tasks in front of the house. Washing clothes in the family compound with the doors open allowed passers-by to sneak peeks inside and appreciate her body's shapeliness whilst simultaneously enabling her to wear sexy dress in a space where this was seen as appropriate. Indeed, this strategy seemed to work for Manuela and many young

women living in detached houses in the university area whose similar efforts to catch one or more gars—more "serious" or less—succeeded.

Consider now a stroll (*une balade*) Stella undertook to the Mokolo market in order to entertain herself (*pour me distraire*). The day before she had had a new hairstyle *la garçonnière* (masculine cut) at a friend's salon. She decided to wear a denim miniskirt and white stretch top and we set out for a day of shopping on the other side of town. She visibly drew attention, not only with her sexy attire but also her hairstyle: heads turned to look at her, exclamations of "wow, nyanga!" and young men asked questions out loud if she were married (*tu es déjà mariée*?) followed her until we turned into the dim alleys where older women and men sold trinkets. Suddenly, the gratifying looks turned into verbal humiliation as one man audibly compared her to a *prostituée*, a category for which Stella was full of contempt. Stella later couched her regret at this misrecognition not in moral terms but rather as the failure of a skill, explaining that she had perhaps walked in too seductive a way: "moving her buttocks like Beyoncé" (chapter 4) and revealing too much. That is, through their dress styles, young women I worked with, like the young women Cole described in Tamatave, had to navigate complex politics of reputation (2006, 2010), here in particular contingent on space.

Indeed, rumours circulated in Yaoundé how, around the Mokolo area, young women who dressed sexy risked having their mini-dresses torn off.[48] Stella was taking this risk, she explained later, because she particularly liked the *gars* who worked at the store where she took me to purchase shoes. Stella believed the young man had shown signs of interest in her the last time she visited his store with her sister, as she saw he had appreciated her skill of creating a resemblance: *you look like Charlotte Dipanda today*, she recalled him saying. But now, he had heard the older man's insult. While it is difficult to assess how it influenced his interest in Stella, she felt "too proud" to visit his store again, nor did I hear of him contacting her during the period of my fieldwork. As Stella's example reveals, any attempt to seduce *un gars* with a sexy dress style—which might feel pleasurable in and of itself—was fraught with the risks of being considered *une fille légère*. Even the very man she was targeting might say this—after all, young men sometimes expressed the same views as older men in the market—this, in turn, articulated the contradictions around seduction and respect that urban women in Cameroon and the rest of the world live in (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2007).

48. Mokolo is the district in which the biggest market in Yaoundé is situated. Similar incidents were described in newspapers as having occurred there.

Commenting on Stella's verbal humiliation, Manuela spoke of discipline: "A respectable woman knows where to restrain herself. A respectable woman first and foremost respects herself and her principles. Prostitutes do not respect themselves, this is the difference. And when you don't respect yourself, how do you want to be respected by others?" Manuela continued: "Dressing well confirms that you are treating yourself seriously. It means you know what to wear when! Have you seen me dressing sexy at school? [she had competed her degree at a prestigious school of administration] Do I want to feel seductive at school, who do I want to seduce? *Le gardien?* This would disturb me … They would not laugh at me, they would chase me away! If you want to be respected, respect yourself!"[49] Manuela's words stress how the treatment of oneself through dress entails expertise also in sensing the context, with all uncertainty and unpredictability that is woven in it, and making the appropriate fashion choice, that is, managing one's seductiveness: knowing how and where to reveal it, pertaining to beauty work. Stella nodded in agreement with the advice of her older sister but, as far as I could tell, her visual strategies changed little thereafter.

Stella's failed attempt to wear sexy style and Manuela's condemnation of it reveals the contradictions embedded in the style and the need for contextual literacy. One of the ways in which young women aimed to resolve these contradictions is through refashioning sexy style in a way that maintains its seductive appeal while simultaneously preserving respect. This new style, *sexy mais responsable*, is a product of the relationship between young women and their seamstresses and incorporates an aesthetic of concealing, or as Bene said: "showing your shape without uncovering your body" (*exposer tes formes sans toutefois exposer ton corps*) (figure 14). Thus, revealing too much through sexy style is qualified by concealment. This reinstated a particular aesthetic of display and disguise which produces desirable physical attraction (cf. Weiss 2009, Ferme 2001) in which the point is "not to distinguish the seen from the unseen, but to reveal that what is valued remains concealed" (Weiss 2009: 149). In practice this meant adding fabric to create volume and heaviness, and wearing dresses of a certain length that, as Gwen said, would "cover knees and arms as well as belly and back." This aesthetic has specific moral connotations. Historically, sewing apprenticeships in Cameroon were gendered, and while men trained more often in factories, women trained in Christian missions preparing to become good wives. In this training, covering particular body parts to a certain length signified female respectability. By accommodating sexy dresses to cover these body parts for the *sexy*

49. "*Etre une femme respectée c'est savoir se retenir. C'est celle qui se respecte. C'est celle qui respecte ses principes. Les prostituées ne se respectent pas. Si tu ne te respectes pas, on ne va pas te respecter. Bien s'habiller témoigne du sérieux qu'on se donne.*"

mais responsable style, young women rehearsed particular forms of respectful womanhood as wifehood (cf. Oyewumi 1997), revealing sexuality and respectability as two sides of the same coin (cf. Cole 2006).

However, the incorporation of responsibility in the name of the style was not only related to invoking responsibility for one's own acts. By calling the style "responsible" in order to solicit respect, young women invoked ideas of industriousness, entrepreneurship and indeed the economic achievement embedded in the function of *une responsable* (e.g. an official in state structures or in a company), an employment position to which many aspired. As such the style's name also spoke to the ideas of womanhood embedded in the chiefdom structures that valued the economic role of women. As young women said: *respectable comme un responsable.*



Figure 14. An example of a *sexy mais responsable* style: tight leggings covering the knees and a tight top covering the arms, all revealing the body's shape while concealing the body itself. Note also the aesthetic of *bien marrier pour frapper*: the hair and t-shirt having matching black-and-white stripes, and the bag and shoes are a matching red. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2016)

Furthermore, recalling Johnson-Hank's arguments about *yoyettes*, trying to withhold from revealing the sexualised female body (*savoir se retenir)* through dress performance in public space constitutes distinction (Bourdieu 1984), a feature of subjectivity, defining "proper femininity" and promising respectful treatment young women desired (chapter 3). Here, recall Christian norms of temperance and modesty as fostered through advice on the proper use of cosmetics (chapter 1) and embedded in Christian notions of personhood and discourses of the nation-state. Young women's verbal statements about attempts to discipline ones' body and its desires recall Foucault's arguments about sexuality as a modern form of discourse that posits the universal realm of biology in the human body as serving modern forms of power (1979). As such, statements such as Manuela's resonate with the demands of the DVD-VCD campaign, revealing how feminine aesthetic subjectivities are formed by submitting to certain norms (Butler 1990). Yet, giving in to the demands of the campaign seemed to be less an issue of discipline and more of management—both Manuela and Stella had ideas about where to wear sexy and where not, where to wear *kaba* (e.g. to the market) and where to wear *sexy mais responsable*—and to do so was a way for them to constitute themselves as respectable young women in waithood (Mahmood 2005). Yet such management could at times fail, an issue to which the following turns.

Dressing sexualities

As afternoon approached, threatening a rainy-season storm, Manuela put on a body-hugging dress in sexy style and went to bring in the clothes drying outside. She sneaked out once more to a neighbour and returned with an iron. Then, she removed the flowery tablecloth from the table and started shaking out, ironing and folding the piles of amassed clothes on the bare surface. After folding a few white T-shirts she wore to play sports, she pulled out a long, ample *kaba* dress made of *pagne*. She was in the midst of telling me how her "serious *gars*"—that is, the young man with whom she was in a relationship which she hoped would lead to marriage—made her angry as he failed to provide for a gas canister upon which she could cook in her student lodging, both for herself and for him. She spoke with despair and anger: "he keeps on coming expecting to talk, eat and have sex." Note that her failure to ensure the "comforts of home" (White 1990) relies on her boyfriend's failure to provide a particular symbol of social

wealth—the gas canister she needs to cook and feed him—indexing intimate economies and undermining not only her but also his own social standing (Bayart 1989).

Whilst ironing the *kaba* Manuela seemed to figure out a solution: "*He*! Now I will wear this dress every evening, I'm telling you, even if I feel like it (*j'ai envie de*) [referring to a phrase from a song by Lady Ponce which expresses desire for sex] e-v-e-r-y evening when he comes in, like this he will understand that I am angry with him! he will not even dare to ask for food … that way he will think!" The *kaba* would cover her curves as it was ample and long; a garment generally considered appropriate for married women, or to wear to a market or church, because no sexual messages were expressed through its cut. "Once he was away," she said, speaking again of her serious *gars*, "he was sent for a mission to the North [of Cameroon], I abstained for 10 maybe 11 months! This was very long, I suffered [worked hard].[50] Sex is for pleasure. […] I wore this *kaba compliqué* everyday! Look at this unique model … when you wear *kaba* you don't feel seductive because it does not hold your body tight!" she concluded and started piling and categorising ironed clothes into suitcases she pulled out from under her bed.

Manuela admitted that managing her desire was hard work and, it later turned out, her attempts had failed. She first assured me that she wore *kaba* to dampen her own desire as much as the desire of a particular young man. He lived in another neighbourhood and worked at a cyber café where she went to send photographs to her *gars*. But then she said she started to feel attracted to him as he looked at her is a way that made her feel seductive. Amongst other favours, he did not charge her the fee for using the internet and gave her money for a taxi home (chapter 5). Manuela said she felt proud to be admired and that her body was desired (*ton corps est desiré, tu es attirante, tu es fière)*. However, she emphasised that she did not envisage this young man to be a candidate for marriage because he was "only working in a cyber café" but then, with head down, admitted: "I could not resist, it was for pleasure" (*je ne pouvais pas résister c'etait le plaisir*). She made me promise I would not repeat this to anyone for it would have revealed her failure at mastering her own desire and risk her unstable reputation of respectability: a reflection of the secrecy in which such affairs were veiled (Gell 2011).[51]

50. Suffering is a common idiom used to refer to hard work without getting results or benefits of this work. Another common use of this idiom is "In Cameroon we suffer" referring to difficulties in sustain oneself economically given the current.
51. Young women also felt proud of managing to keep their desires at bay—who could withhold from sex for pleasure for longer was, at times, a matter of competition.

The fact that Manuela had not mentioned this pleasurable affair to me before suggests that she, like other women I met, and similar to what Arnfred observed in Mozambique, conceived of "sex for pleasure" as separate from, but not opposed to, "sex for reproduction" (2004), defying the dichotomous distinction between reproductive sexuality and commodified sexuality that the DVD-VCD campaign seemed to suggest and invoking transactional forms from before that binary existed (see above).[52] This does not mean that "sex for procreation" does not entail "sex for pleasure", rather that distinct sexual attitudes underpin marriage and out-of-marriage contexts. Pleasure in sexual affairs is part of female erotic knowledge transmitted across generations (chapter 1) echoing similar practices described by Tamale in Uganda (2005, Groes-Green 2013) or Mustafa in Senegal (2006). Sexual dissatisfaction within a marriage, some interlocutors maintained, can be a cause of separation today, as happened with Bene and Daisy's mother's sister.[53]

Thus, if young women avowedly practiced self-restraint, articulating sex in the terms imposed by the campaign, they also articulated sex as a site of pleasure—while wearing the same styles. Manuela neither spoke about nor practiced sexuality as a coherent sexual attitude to be cultivated for the inner self, i.e. bodies are individual (cf. Foucault 1979). Rather, through dress styles, she worked on her own and others' senses to manage her and others' sensations as temporary and fleeting states, i.e. bodies are relational (cf. Foucault 1979, cf. Groes-Green 2013, cf. Sponk 2014). That is, young women's practices defied the patriarchal reading of sexuality as restricted to procreation or commodified sexuality as advocated by the campaign. Instead, they articulated sex as pleasure, outside its commodified associations.

Thus, I suggest, we might consider their practices in the light of Lorde's arguments about the erotic as the site of pleasure (Lorde 1993 [1978]). Lorde is helpful for she proposes to see the erotic as not restricted to the sexual act but a feeling or affect that has to do with care for the body and for the self, cultivating a consciousness of one's desires, what she calls affirmative sensuality (1993 [1979]). Often as I entered young women's boarding rooms or visited them at their kin's homes on Sundays they were immaculately dressed, sexy or *sexy mais responsable*. Sometimes I mistakenly thought they were about to go out whereas, as they explained, they

52. I only realised later that I had specifically framed our previous conversations in terms of marriage (aspirations), thus Manuela did not mention to me her pleasurable affair while her "serious *gars*" was away because she believed we were discussing her future marriage.
53. Women also saw sexual dissatisfaction as resulting from men having other relationships and stipulated that those other women must have lower standards of satisfaction from sexual intercourse if they accepted their husbands. Within chiefdoms, I was told, if a chief's wife requested sex but he was unable to meet her desires, she could request to see her "lover" instead (cf. Ongoum 1980), a right that was granted to her, provided secrecy.

were staying home, concluding "I do beauty for myself". To be sure, as mentioned above, these statements towards privacy served a certain aesthetics of concealing-while-revealing that only increased the attractiveness of *nyanga*, as Stella's story above illustrates. Also, if some young women remained in sexy styles at home at the demand of their kin, they still could and did photograph these and other styles and circulate them to others in view of opening opportunities (chapter 3 and 5). But we can see also how the contemporary practices of these young women, such as wearing sexy and staying at home—like the erotic practices of their grandmothers—consisted precisely of the cultivation of certain affective states and feelings, consciousness and work on one's desires (Arnfred 2014). Where Lorde would argue such practices are potentially empowering, while young women did not speak of their practices in these terms, we can recall Stella's words above, how doing beauty at home for oneself and wearing sexy with the confinement of the compound is also a way to practice certain sensual movements of their bodies to more confidently stage them later on in public space. Other young women who stayed at home in sexy styles, trained in posing (chapter 3) at length before they took the one perfect image of themselves and their styles, and felt confident to circulate it on social networks (chapter 5). Here, note, training was concealed, and indeed was only successful when a seemingly effortless outcome was revealed (chapter 5). Yet, young women found the articulation of the erotic as compatible with the practices of submitting to the demands of the DVD-VCD campaign; defying notions of a clear opposition between transgression and norms. As such, young women's practices also defied the colonial dichotomy of sex for pleasure versus sex for procreation reinstated by the campaign.

These conceptualisations complicate accounts of modern sexuality and selfhood wherein sexuality becomes a private issue while sexual pleasure is experienced as an interior feeling. Such accounts are predicated on the notion of modern personhood as constructed in terms of interior and exterior that stand opposed to each other in an indexical fashion (cf. Foucault 1979, cf. Butler 1990). That is, dress promotes an indeterminate relation between appearance and the self or, in other words, does away with the distinction itself. Rather, sexualities as much as the self can be a matter of crafted surfaces or fashion and fashioned through popular dress styles. Thus, if discourses about sexuality embedded in the campaign aimed to constitute it as a bodily essence of the self, by managing their bodies' erotic charge these young women crafted sexuality not as an interior essence but an exterior quality (Warnier 2007).[54] Because it is an

54. Note the different conceptions about the body that young women practices of wearing *kaba* articulate, similar to those described in the previous chapter. When Manuela wore *kaba* for self-restraint this was underpinned by a notion of the body as a bounded whole which works

embodied skill, where and how to (un)dress sexualities and when could become a matter of pride, competition and mastery, as the following discusses (cf. Sponk 2004, 2014, Arnfred 2004).

Technologies of (dis)enchantment

As soon as her ironing was finished Manuela got ready to venture to a *snack-bar* explaining: "what I wear depends on how I feel, if I feel seductive and I want to encourage *un gars* I wear sexy; if I want to discourage *un gars* I wear *mater style*; or when I do not feel like having sex I will put a *kaba* on." Thus, dress styles—as a part of doing *nyanga*—were chosen with particular goals in mind: to seduce a man, to render a jealous competitor full of desire; more generally, to ensnare an audience. These intentions were embedded in dress through garment production and achieved sensory effects through performance (Austin 1975 [1962]), reminiscent of Gell's ideas on technologies of enchantment (1988).

Despite his refutation of aesthetics, Gell's (1988) object agency theory is about social effects caused by people engaging with objects in terms of their sensory qualities—recall, for example, the place of volume and sheen in the aesthetics of prestige (chapter 1)—that is, the way they look.[55] Gell (1988) proposes that the intentions of creators—here, young women and their seamstresses—are embedded in the process of production; here, the object is a dress (and, as we will see in later chapters, photographs). The object, when looked at, instantiates the agency of its makers and can enhance the agency of the young woman wearing the garment. At the same time, the object enchants the viewer and this enchantment is fashioned in the object's design (i.e. its making). Such enchantment is a product of a technical process, but Gell suggests it is not perceived as such by the audience. The way the object looks—its allure—inhibits its comprehension in terms of its production and instead engages sensory reception that solicits enchantment. While Gell's suggestion is underpinned by Kantian notions of the separation of

on itself; desire too is conceived of as an individual matter that can thus be disciplined or tamed. Yet when Manuela wore *kaba* to tame her pleasure and failed, it implies that bodies can be activated or deactivated to engage or disengage the erotic as power; thus her own desire was activated by another body, and despite her restraint, could not be tamed. That is, bodies are conceived of in both individual and relational terms.

55. Gell refutes aesthetics because he draws on Kant, who not only separates aesthetics from the other—political, social, economic—realms of life but also frames it in rational terms. Thus, Kantian aesthetics are a form of disinterested judgement. When Gell writes about Kula and its effects of dazzlement, although he does not refer explicitly to the body and the senses, his description provides leeway for bringing aesthetics back into his conceptual framework when aesthetics are understood in the original sense of the term: perceptive by feeling, thus referring to corporeal and material culture, or as famously stated "Aesthetics is a discourse of the body" (Eagelton 1991:13 in Meyer 2010). The problem with Gell's theory is that he takes authorial agency as deterministic.

body and mind, this thesis conversely suggests the technical process can be recognised and appreciated as such (here, as young women's skills and industriousness), and produce enchantment (Tonda 2005). In order to account for this we must reinsert aesthetics into Gell's theory, but not as he conceived it, as disembodied judgement, but as the discourse of the sensuous body (Meyer 2010). From this perspective we might appreciate that the way the object looks persuades the audience to act in sensory ways—aesthetics are mobilised to elicit a response to the sensation of viewing the object, and thus to achieving desired social outcomes (Thrift 2008). As such, alluring dress performances, when successful, create Gellian traps (1988) for "the skin is faster than the word" (Massumi 1995:86).

Young women like Stella and Manuela constantly searched for the latest trends to craft their unique styles online and sent them via Bluetooth to their seamstresses who then produced the garment for them (chapter 3). The seamstress would often modify the design a little *(changer un peu)*—a subject of intense discussion—personalising it and leaving her unique imprint. Indeed, seamstresses were at times referred to, or called themselves, *couturières-visionnaires*, and couched their greatest achievements in that idiom: "it has appeared in my dreams", they might say. Indeed, some seamstresses felt that their creativity transcended them as Rita, Manuela's seamstress, explained: "I am inspired by God, God designed the human body, who can be a better creator? The inspirations for my dresses the best designs I made it took me time and skill but if I was so creative it was thanks to God". This quality of transcendence was further performed through an utterance of awe—or "wow"—which points to the beyond and thus heightens the garment's exceptionality (Meyer 2010). Hence, producer and consumer alike represented the garment as possessing a "magical" appeal or "allure of glamour" (Thrift 2009).[56]

This in turn echoes the logic of magic (Mauss, 1972 [Mauss and Hubert, 1902] cf. Malinowski 1993 [1922], cf. Pritchard 1976 [1937], cf. Frazer (1981) [1890]) described as characteristic not only in Pritchard's classic account of the Azande (1976 [1937]), but more recently for fashion systems (Morean 2017) and late capitalism at large (Thrift 2008, Illouz 2017). In other words, "in the substance lies the mystical power which produces desired end" (Pritchard 1937:441) which here takes the form of objects designed to generate passionate interests,

56. Etymologically words like glamour (old Scottish *gramyre* meaning magic, enchantment , spell) or allure have their origins in forms of magic. "The word pretty once meant cunning skillful and artful as is derived from *preotting* meaning a wile. Fascinate meant to bewitch or enchant from Latin *fascinum* meaning spell or witchcraft; allure to attract tempt or captivate primary through the gait or way of walking" (Moerean 2017:4)

emotions or affects. Indeed, the aesthetic design of products in aesthetic capitalism (Illouz 2017) is meant to generate or sell sensory experiences, i.e. form follows emotion (Thrift 2009, cf. Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991). Yet the visual performative acts that Stella performed, as described earlier in this chapter (Austin 1975 [1962]), derive their efficacy not only from material qualities but the performative processes that activate them. In the next chapter we will see how the camera of the android phone enabled these processes to be replicated and enhanced (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1937]).

Young women like Rita today work as seamstresses and call themselves *couturières-visionnaires*—professional magicians—but this female profession did not have a very positive evaluation until recently. A popular song, "CCC"—or cashiers, seamstresses and hairdressers (*caissières, couturières, coiffeuses)*—by the Côte d'Ivoire *zouglou* band Espoir 2000 depicted seamstresses as unambitious, alongside others such as hairdressers and cashiers. Earlier perceptions of seamstresses were also related to the domestic space and religion. This is because, as previously noted, while men undertook tailoring apprenticeships in colonial enterprises, women learnt how to stitch and knit in missions as a part of apprenticeships to become "good mothers and wives" (see also chapter 3). With the end of the Cold War and the devaluation of the FCFA in 1994, many households were in need of extra economic support to make ends meet and it is in this period that many of the older women I met told me how they turned their domestic skills into a professional activity. This way they remained in proximity to their responsibilities related to the kitchen and children. The importance of "being fashion" and the means afforded by trade and media liberalisation in the 2000s partly changed these negative perceptions, I was told by older tailors and seamstresses alike, as the images of fashion-forward female designers circulating on TV channels redeemed the profession. Indeed, many young seamstresses today prefer to refer to themselves not as *couturières* but by the more prestigious designation of designer (*designeuse*) even when this is aspirational.

Many young women had their dresses stitched by seamstresses who had relationships with their kin (chapter 1). Bene, for example, had her dresses stitched where her mother, aunt and sister did. This was because partial payments would be more easily accepted; as the common dictum goes, "family, it's on credit" (*famille, c'est à crédit*). But some of the seamstresses did not stitch the specific types of dresses young women wanted. Bene for example had one dress stitched at a tailor she did not know but who displayed what she considered alluring styles. She further explained that when you went to a man "*il n'y a pas de chi-chi*" referring to the

atmosphere of female sociality embodied in gossip and arguments in sewing shops. Indeed, many women considered that older tailors had better skills than young women but knew less of the newest fashions. Older tailors in turn recalled that what is in fashion now was also in the past. Some tailors, many of whom were of different origins (Senegalese, Malian, *nordistes,* i.e. Muslims from the Northern region of Cameroon) specialised in different styles e.g. embroidered items which were more expensive. What mattered for young women choosing where to have their dresses made was unique or exceptional style, and the allure their styles could generate. Economically, however, it was not always feasible. Young women tried to opt for seamstresses and tailors whose skills they valued (Guyer and Belinga 1995), not those with relationships with their kin, but ended up going to the same ones who would offer them credit. Thus, if clothing could potentially cut across ethnic lines, the lack of economic means often circumvented this, instead reinforcing ethnic allegiances.



Figure 15. An example of *bien marier pour frapper*. Trousers and the belt are of the same fabric to create resemblance, and are in darker colours to contrast with the lighter top. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

The allure that the dresses generated, was first and foremost, materially produced. The seamstress enchanted a dress into being through its aesthetics: a combination of cut, volume, colour, decorations (such as sequins, lace, ribbon, glitter) with different textures of textiles in such a way so as to create glow, resemblances and contrasts which would "hit the eye" (*bien marier pour frapper*) (figure 15). This of course necessitated expert sewing skills, precision of trained eye and current fashion knowledge that seamstresses and young women debated, argued about and shared (chapter 3). In this way, both seamstresses and young women aimed to create a "unique style" for the wearer, and, as the next chapter will show, market it as such. The finished garment, when worn on the body, produced pleasure for the wearer and for the viewer alike, soliciting imaginary explorations through sensory ways (Thrift 2008). Thus, the garment became seductive or enchanting: for the woman who desired to wear it, for her jealous competitors who couldn't resist copying it (chapter 3), and the young men who fell for her (chapter 5)—the viewer was built into the design.

Thus, if a dress was invested with particular intentions and qualities in its production, these qualities were conferred upon the wearer in a dressed performance (cf. Newell 2012, Sylvanus 2016). Dress and body coalesced to engage certain feelings in the wearer. Hence, for example, Manuela felt seductive wearing tight sexy styles that "[held] her body well". Through the way in which she wore that garment—or how her body moved the dress—she made men desire her and women want to copy her movements and styles (chapter 3 and 4). In wearing the garment, it, as the object, becomes foundational to a person's agency, and boundaries are blurred between the object and the subject in the performance, displacing the qualities between them (Gell 1992, Latour 2010). Locating agency at the intersection of the body and object allows us to see how the same female body can enchant or disenchant male desire, depending on what a young woman wears. Thus, enchantment works while being recognised as embodied knowledge, as a skill in sensuous performance.

However, it is not only an object that is foundational to the subject's agency, but the object's particular aesthetic qualities: glow, tightness, volume, ampleness, length, texture. How they are assembled in the garment, and the effects it produces concealing while revealing, are foundational to producing emotional and affective states in the self and other: desire, pride, pleasure, jealousy, attraction constitute the structures of feelings engaged through *nyanga*. As such, enchantment not only produces affective responses from the self and other, but in the very process constitutes the self and other: a seductive young woman, a jealous female

competitor and a desiring male suitor.[57] In other words, technologies of enchantment produced aesthetic subjectivities.

Indeed, many young men admitted that *nyanga* performances staged by *filles androides* were *irrésistible*. This was illustrated one early afternoon when, after the student association meeting, I joined the group of young men who presided over it for a round of drinks in one of the bars in the university area. It was dim inside, with a large screen hanging on the wall. A music channel was on. Florian and his friends continued discussing unresolved issues from the meeting whilst drinking beer. As time passed, more and more young women and men filled the bar's dim spaces. After the third round of beers and amidst heated discussion about how to get sponsorship for a football match, Florian's gaze was suddenly directed elsewhere. A young woman had entered, dressed in tight overalls made out of *pagne* with a "keyhole" on the back edged with lace. She had thick black hair extensions and black high-heeled shoes, both polished to shine. She walked slowly, swinging her hips which visibly caught everyone's attention. In seconds, heated conversations fell into silence. Florian looked at his friends:

> When a woman walks like this, dressed in tight sexy dress, but a little respectful as well, she does *nyanga*, *mon frère*, how can you resist? Desire is natural, you cannot resist. Once a *go* passes by, she seduces you, *e-kie*! you are caught! [he laughs] You will go as far as begging her [*tu vas même la supplier!*]

As the afternoon turned into evening and Florian's friends headed to their homes, I walked back with him towards another bar where, he said, other business awaited him. He decided to take a shortcut through the *quartier,* down alleys dense with student accommodation. Our conversation revolved around seduction and intimate relations, the topic of a philosophical debate during the student association meeting Florian had presided over that afternoon. As he

57. Although young and old men alike were often enchanted by female performances, older men condemned young ones who, they felt, were easily seduced by young women who might deceive them and profit off their meagre means. Pa Antoine, an old tailor at the market where Bene worked, observed a young man who occasionally sold vegetables in front of his parcel. The young man, Pa Antoine reckoned, fell too easily into a trap that one of the young women who often passed through the market must have set up using her dress. He noticed how the young man's eyes were glued to the appearance of that young woman. Whereas he appreciated that the way the young woman dressed was attractive, he condemned the overtness with which the two seemed to him to have initiated a relationship. This could not lead to a serious relationship, he concluded. He later stressed he was displeased about the way all this was happening, echoing the campaign and hinting to generational divisions and tensions about a say in choosing partners (chapter 5). These kinds of things, Pa Antoine, continued, should not be openly revealed in public. This is, one should not refrain from such affective encounters but rather keep them secret (Gell 1996, Archambault 2017). Whereas Pa Antoine's narrative resonates with the ways in which youth is represented in popular discourse, he did not condemn the enchantment per se, rather he regretted, as mentioned earlier the ostentatious ways in which physical attraction was generated today (and fabrication that often underpins such attraction), in part disregarding young women's own "sexy" predicament and navigation of concealment and revelation in their own ways.

shared with me his cunning ideas about how to evaluate if a woman is serious or not, he pointed out a young woman passing by:

> Look when a young woman wears *kaba* like this one, she loses her value! She should know that she should at least be nice to look at [*agréable à voir*]. When her dress does not draw out her body's curves well [*designer son corps*] you know that it shows her shapes but at the same times does not show her body … I will not even look at her!

He ostentatiously turned his gaze away, adding, "*une femme qui fait rien*" [a woman who does nothing]. Female *nyanga*, as the inebriated Florian's comments revealed, is a product of female labour, of beauty work (chapter 1), something that young men appreciate.

But many young women wore *kaba*, and other "more imposing" and ample dresses made out of *pagne* to purposefully discourage men. "When a young woman wearing this style [pointing to *kaba*] is seen by a *gars*, he thinks you are already taken, that you are not to be played with. But he does not know you play with him!" Manuela clasped her hands tightly, concluding her story of how she wore ample dresses to make one young man give up on her. She was particularly confident that this strategy had worked and revealed how she had managed her other "catches" through dress. She told me about a young man working in a clothes shop located on the way to her aunt's house. As she took this route often, he tried on several occasions to engage in conversation with her and kept calling her when he got her phone number. He offered to pay for her taxi home. She noted when she was wearing sexy he was more affectionate and exploited this when she needed money. But as she wanted to discourage him she wore *kaba* at times and would not even stop in front of the shop, explaining she was in a hurry to help her aunt. She told me she considered this relationship as potentially getting her some affective and economic benefits but doubted he was an appropriate catch. His dress style did not appeal to her, and because she saw him at all times in the clothes shop, she assumed he was not trying to get a better job. She claimed she was interested in better-dressed and educated men and, it turned out, she was maintaining relationships with two such men. She used similar dress strategies to alternately encourage or discourage them, to skilfully manage their feelings or desires (chapter 5), admitting that while such management entailed much work, not least in concealing them from one another, she kept both because she was uncertain where the relationships might lead (Johnson-Hanks 2017).

If kin invested in their daughters' beauty work (chapter 1) their resources were often limited; indeed, often they were insufficient to get dresses for all their daughters at the same time—in the previous chapter, for instance, we saw how Daisy resorted to alternative means since her parents' resources were reserved for the elder sister's *nyanga*. However, young women found creative ways to obtain the resources they lacked (Guyer and Belinga 1995). They would save taxi money by, for example, walking home as Manuela often did; they convinced seamstresses to take payment in instalments; they did part of the labour required to stitch dresses themselves (e.g. sewing on buttons, ironing); they tricked female kin into sharing some of their ceremonial *pagne.* At other times they received money from parents or from a visiting relatives and tried to save up; often, they lured young men into giving money for a new dress by promising a continually deferred sexual exchange (cf. Cole and Thomas 2009, Cole 2004, chapter 5). Once they have had sufficient means to stitch a new dress they could use it to lure yet other men. This is what Manuela did with the young man at the clothes shop, offering pleasures and creating an enchantment that held him in a sensory grip (Thrift 2008).

The engagement of the senses solicited through material qualities and moved through performances allowed young women to navigate their relations with men. Manuela elicited or discouraged feelings in different men, essentially choosing relationships for their different purposes: she caught men when her number one choice was away because she desired to experience sexual pleasure; other young women entertained relationships with several men in order to get money from them and send it to kin, buy phone credit or new dresses; to pay rent; or for emotional support. Whereas some of these relationships entailed sexual exchange, the majority were aimed at avoidance of involvement in sexual economies. That often meant genuinely invoking Christian mores. Indeed, young women felt proud when they managed to withhold their sexual desires, and incessantly postponed planned meetings, sending a new and alluring photograph instead (chapter 5). In this, these young women differed from others described in the literature, such as *jeunes* in Madagascar (Cole 2010) *ashawos* in Ghana (Chernoff 2003, 2005) or *godraps* in Côte d'Ivoire (Newell 2012); they sought to maintain themselves as religious and faithful in accordance with church dictates, doing away with the co-constitution of material and emotional aspects of intimate exchanges (chapter 5, Thomas and Cole 2009). They also differed from other generations where sex with different partners before marriage was an acceptable part of the pursuit of a husband. While young women admitted in private that having multiple relationships was difficult, and feared being discovered, they also explained that today you don't know which relationship will lead to a

"serious" one. Thus, often they seduced several men to increase their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). In other words, their technologies of enchantment afforded them to accumulate their wealth in men as their wealth in people (Guyer and Belinga 1995)—these men provided the money for dresses that young women combined with other sources to lure the next man who again provided money, and so on.

But, if successful stories abounded in female circles—young women agreed that if someone displayed new and complex dress styles too often, there was "one or several men behind that" —the precise details of successful catches and failures remained concealed. This secrecy, on the one hand, allowed young women to remain respectable and, on the other, prevented competition. It also held a reputational potential, for (jealous) women would stick around one another as followers or friends in order to tacitly observe one another catching strategies and imitate them (chapter 3). Once, upon my insistence, and when we were on our own, Manuela unwillingly admitted how she missed a potential catch: "I wore sexy but responsible dress made out of *pagne*, it was very good! You see the recent Mani Bella dress, but I changed it a bit (*changer un peu*) …I walked like this [demonstrating] and I hope to call his attention but nothing! I tried several times but then I was tired. This has never occurred to me! But maybe my dress was too responsible, a bit too long [showing how it covered her knees], with too much decoration."

Seductive performances remained uncertain for, as visual illocutionary acts, they depended on the uptake of the audience (Austin 1975 [1962]). Indeed, the magic of fashion in particular (Morean 2017:6) and magic in general both breed and remediate uncertainty (Gell 1992:57, Malinowski 1993:29-31 [1922]). Uncertainty is also an inherent part of courtship (Archambault 2017, Berthome et al 2012). Young women's acts were fraught with uncertainty: what if a style is seen as too sexy, or too respectable? What if dressing sexy leads to being called *prostituée* by the very man one has set out to seduce? Young men, for their part, were suspicious of whether young women's intentions were serious or if they were—as popular representations of *filles androides* would have it—trying to get the greatest material benefit through multiple relationships. There were limits to their patience with young women who constantly deferred sexual and/or affective exchange. Many of my interlocutors were well aware of the traps that dressed performance can set. However, young women embraced uncertainty (di Nunzio 2015) embedded in such acts because, as the following will show, these acts also redirected the temporality of embodied knowledge to the beyond and unknown (Miyazaki 2006, chapter 4,

Meyer 2010) Thus, young women continued to participate in these performances in order to open up a chance.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how young women visually fashion seductiveness through dress. It started with an examination of the government's DVD-VCD campaign which aimed to regulate female dress in public spaces and, in particular, to outlaw the wearing of sexy styles considered immoral. Inscribing the 2013 campaign within a longer trajectory of colonial and postcolonial obsessions with the naked female body the first section showed how postcolonial discourse embodied by the campaign, are concerned with the making of, naturalising and legitimising certain ideas about female bodies and sexualities (Coly 2015), here in particular related to commodification (Tonda 2005) and reproduction. By extension they normalise particular notions of sexualities and moral womanhood, in this case hinging on procreative sex (Spronk 2014), wifehood and motherhood (Oyewumi 1997).

Section two showed how young women negotiate norms imposed by the campaign which discourage wearing sexy, a style which is, at the same time, considered key to exercising seduction. While young women find that seduction through sexy procures pleasure, they equally desire not to appear immoral and not to be treated without respect, and thus find both rhetorical and practical solutions through which to "respect themselves" (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2006). These solutions involve being seen to limit visibility, such as wearing sexy within the limits of one's home, or creatively reinventing styles; however, young women also venture outside in sexy attire in order to seduce. Such seduction enterprises are fraught with the risk of losing respectability and encourage women to manage their sexual agency, further embracing the dictates of the state campaign (cf. Foucault 1979).

Section three described how women use dress to manage their own desires but also the desire of others. The ways in which they do this reveals how dress styles act as a way to activate or deactivate the body's erotic charge (Lorde 1998 [1987]). As such, these ways of using dress styles reveal alternative ideas to those promulgated by the government's campaign, notably related to sex as pleasure (Arnfred 2014), and complicate accounts of modern sexuality as a form of patriarchal state power (cf. Foucault 1979).

The fourth section inquired into how dress enchants and disenchants both others and the self. Furthering the argument that visual self-fashioning generates sensory effects, this section showed how the enchantment and disenchantment that young women's embodied performances generate are products of skills and technology (Gell 1988). Answering the overarching thesis question about what it is that visual self-fashioning does, and what it affords women to do, this section showed how embodied performances of dress styles allow women to accumulate their wealth in men (Guyer and Belinga 1995) through the sensory effects that material garments generate: a form of secular magic resonant with aesthetic capitalism (Illouz 2017).

Throughout, the chapter has approached dress and sexuality in material and embodied fashion and in doing so highlighted female agency without celebrating it as empowering or seeing it as disabling. By showing how young women's practices defy such classifications as well as combine elements of them, the chapter has thus offered a complementary approach to the existing literature of sexuality and dress, showing how aesthetic subjectivities are being made. In arguing how visual seductiveness is produced as a technology of (dis)enchantment (cf. Gell 1988), the chapter has furthered the main argument of this thesis that beauty work amounts to valued skills and embodied knowledge which generate sensory effects.



Figure 16. Annie worked on this unique for months and many followers wanted to copy it. They appreciated especially the *manche bouffante* (covering her right arm). This style invited respectable treatment and many gifts from the followers who copied it. Annie invested these gifts in yet another style. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

THREE:

Fashioning respectability

I waved Annie goodbye and hurried to catch a group taxi home before the imminent evening storm. “I’ll walk with you,” she said and dived behind the curtain which divided her boarding room. It was a long while before she appeared again. Now dressed in a knee-length *pagne* skirt and a tight green top with *col Mao* (Mao collar) decorated with glittering sequins she said “I’m ready,” but then decided to first apply “lights” (*phares*), that is, eyeshadow. This turned out to be a lengthy operation. She coloured her eyelids blue to match one of the shades of her *pagne* skirt. Red lipstick provided the finishing touch but, unsatisfied with the effect, she erased it and tried again. The colours in her garments contrasted with each other and brought out her skin tone. After having searched for a comb to discipline her hair, she dabbed on a little bit of shiny gel so that her hair shone and held firmly together. As we walked from her student digs to a crossroad where a taxi was easier to catch, she slowed down, paying attention to the looks she was given.[58] Her *sexy mais responsable* style emphasised the swinging movements of her body, concealing it while revealing her shape. She knew that Sunday evening was a busy time in the area. Other students would be coming back from a weekend away visiting parents in the villages, from the well-attended Sunday evening mass at a church located nearby, or from student association meetings and so on. These returns ensured a broad spectatorship for Annie’s *nyanga* performance. Indeed, as she passed, the eyes of most men were glued to her appearance and movements. As we waited for a taxi, several women standing next to Annie ostentatiously scrutinised her appearance at length. One of them, holding a phone in her hand, asked Annie if she could photograph her skirt, something that Annie welcomed. She presented her style from the front, from the back and from the side, posing with pride as everyone watched the other woman photographing her style.

Young women I worked with searched for styles both online and offline, and many admitted feeling pride when others asked if they could have their styles copied. Photographing a dress hanging outside the sewing shop on one’s way to school or searching for a style on one’s phone at night when internet fees are lower and the other members of the household asleep, were just

58. If, in the early stages of my fieldwork I was a marker of status and prestige for the young women I worked with, with time this appeal waned, not least as my styles and lack of make-up were not appealing to most.

some of the ways in which young women updated their skills and knowledge about how to make the latest, unique and fashionable style (figure 16). Surveillance of others' styles—at a sewing shop, while waiting for a collective taxi back home, or scrolling through images on Facebook—were equally crucial for young women's fashion skills. This chapter continues the exploration of dress in the previous chapter but moves away from seductiveness to respectability. How, I ask, do young women fashion respectability and reputation through dress styles?

Issues of respectability are central to the literature concerning women and consumption in Africa and beyond (e.g. Hodgson and McCurdy 2005, White 1991, Weinbaum at all 2008). Scholars have noted the efforts of early missionaries to transform women into good wives to fit bourgeois ideals of domesticity through a set of practices including wearing particular body-covering attire (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, Burke 1994, Allman 2004); and pointed out the role of colonial notions of respectability in young women's lives even today (e.g. Gilbert 2014). Taking a semiotic approach, many of these studies draw out how fashion has been conceived in opposition to respectability, instead connoting "wayward women" who gained economic independence in—from the vantage point of bourgeois domesticity—suspicious ways.

Recent approaches to fashion in Africa draw on theories of materiality and embodiment (Madison and Hansen 2013, Gott and Loughran 2010, Rovine 2009), implying analytical attention to the ways in which surfaces and their properties make states of beings as well as social relations (Miller 2005). In order to account for the embodied dimension of dress and fashion practice, Hansen proposes to look at fashionability as "an aesthetic sensibility involving discerning skills from a variety of sources in creating an overall look that results in pride, pleasure and experiences of feeling good" (Hansen 2013:303). As such we might appreciate how clothing and fashion require different types of skills. This is what Hansen calls "clothing competence" (Hansen 2003): "consumers' concern with the quality, construction, care and style potentials of garments [that] places materiality at the centre of their clothing savvy" (Hansen 2003:107). In this vein, Bastian in her discussion of fashion and social mobility in Nigeria (2013), and Sylvanus in her discussion of changing fashion values in Togo (2013), both show how fashion can become a measure of female success, a productive form of labour requiring skills that brings about respect and recognition in female circles and beyond (cf. Mustafa 2002). Taking a similar approach which starts from the body (Warnier 2007) and

focuses on the material and sensory aspects of dress, this chapter discusses how fashion goes hand in hand with respectability, extending questions of efficacy beyond display to circulation, and asking what the sensory effects of pride and pleasure afford for young women and their followers alike.

Where this thesis argues that beauty work objectifies and commodifies female bodies and is an embodied set of skills and knowledge that generate sensory effects, this chapter draws out how dressing fashionably requires skills and competences. Furthering my broader argument that beauty work generates sensory effects, this chapter shows how such effects are reproduced through circulation. As young women display and circulate their fashionable garments, the chapter argues that they elicit respectable treatment, build up a reputation and alter their social positions, through the fashionable styles they share.

The first section starts with an examination of normative ideas about what it means to be a respected woman in contemporary Cameroon. Whereas these forms of respect are desirable, they remain unavailable for the young women this thesis describes. The next section illustrates how the display of dress styles that entail skills and fashion competences offers avenues for claiming respectability in alternative ways (Sylvanus 2013). The android phone extends such opportunities and thus, the third section shows, through distribution and circulation of images of dress styles young women can build and enhance a reputation of fashionista and accumulate followers; translating their skills, garments and knowledge into social relations (Guyer and Belinga 1995, Munn 1988).

To dress for respect

Bene's mother was closing her stand after a particularly quiet day. As she energetically rolled the shutter down, she complained that the "market is tough" these days and recounted stories of women of her generation who did not make enough money, be it by selling at markets in Yaoundé or back in their Grassfields villages. She recalled how her sister, who had a fruit stand by the road, once left to pick up her child from school and, upon returning, found the stand empty: robbed by vandals or by the police. She reminded me how her other sister, a seamstress at another market in Yaoundé which I frequently visited, could not work for months as the whole market was cut off from electricity after a rainy season flood. In contrast, she recalled

assisting her own mother, back in the village, to sell vegetables in the market, which was on the way from school to her home compound. She recalled how her mother had sold well and had money, and regretted what she saw as the closing of economic opportunities for women in Cameroon today, concluding with anger: in Cameroon, the woman is not respected (*on ne respecte pas la femme ici*).

On another occasion Ma Elize, the sister whose market stall was closed for months, told me the story of a friend who left her husband after having put up with his *deuxième bureau* (i.e. mistresses) for several years. It was the threat of HIV which ultimately pushed her to leave the house, something Ma Elize said must have been a tough decision for her friend given shame this can bring. Ma Elize also spoke of a cousin in the village who had to quit her household as her mother-in-law treated her poorly—in Walter-Said's terms "almost as a slave" (2017). Ma Elize described how family gatherings were called to debate the situation and the common conclusion was that, with all the suffering the cousin experienced, and despite the shame it might bring, she should leave. Ma Elize made sure I understood that marriage is important for a woman's status, bringing all sorts of economic and social benefits not only to the married woman—for whom she admitted marriage could be at times happy and at times hard—but for the entire family. With all the broken marriages today, with all the difficulties young women experience in finding a suitable candidate, she continued, it is no surprise that: "in Cameroon women are not respected today."

Both Bene's mother and aunt used a phrase I heard over and over from younger and older generations alike, that in Cameroon "women are not respected". Their narratives either tied respect to economic achievement or to marriage (e.g. married woman would be treated or greeted in another manner), echoing state, church and chiefdom ideologies. Both paths were and are considered important for women in relation to their industriousness and upward social mobility (den Ouden 1987, Warnier 1998). However, as young, unmarried women in "waithood" (Honwana 2005), that is waiting to marry and to find a job, the young women this thesis describes belonged to a social category for which such forms of respect are hard to attain. Whereas having children was something young women desired, all of them, like their Beti counterparts waited to seize a promising chance (Johnson-Hanks 2005). This often entailed a

search for the most suitable husband with whom to give birth (see chapter 5).[59] Whereas all the young women I worked with were going through university education, many expressed growing disillusionment with its ability to secure them jobs that would enable them to prove their economic industriousness in the future. These young women, for whom the forms of respectability achieved through marriage and economic prosperity were still to materialise, drew on longstanding valuation of skills and knowledge (Guyer 1993) to fashion respectability through dress. In doing so, they revealed alternative notions of respectability to those tied with colonial domesticity and dress, echoing the practices of Togolese women that Sylvanus describes (2013, 2016).

If young women could build and claim respectability through dress it was predicated on the increased accessibility of textiles in the post-Cold War era. Until the 1990s the import of second-hand clothing was officially banned in Cameroon, and the cost of both imported and locally-produced textiles restricted the practice of dressing fashionably. Today, while women value *pagnes* made by the Dutch company Vlisco most highly, followed by French, Ivorian and Nigerian imports, the prices (starting at 15,000 FCFA per piece) reserve Vlisco textiles, in particular, for rare occasions. Instead young women and their mothers opted for locally-produced textiles by the national company CICAM (starting at 6,500 FCFA) and Chinese-made *pagnes* (starting at 3,000 FCFA) which allowed them to ensure a considerable variety of styles. If materials coming from China were appreciated for their material qualities—"London shines", as many described them—it was also known that "London *se délave*", that is, the sheen easily washes away, implying poorer quality. However young women and their mothers still opted for the Chinese textiles, as their affordability allowed them to constantly "be fashion".

Many judgements of style pointed out how dressing well means demonstrating one's fashion ability including the uniqueness of the style, the visual skill to combine garments to generate allure, and dressing appropriately for a social milieu. Certain occasions were considered legitimate for young women to display their skills and styles: weddings, funerals, baptisms, diploma ceremonies, annual family reunions and other ceremonies related to the state, kin or village, all ensured broadest audiences. Young women vigilantly monitored the details of their own dresses at such events and judged the way other women were dressed, carefully examining

59. Women most often used local herbs and, rarely the pill for contraception, and also practiced abortion to end pregnancies (see Johnson-Hanks 2006). Young men usually refused to use condoms explaining: *le banane ne se mange pas avec la peau*. I return to the topic of bearing children and waiting for husbands in the conclusion.

and debating each aspect of a garment and recalling who wore what, when and how. Success was also measured in the way young fashionably dressed woman were treated by others, for example how many eyes followed one at the evening gala event of a wedding, and how many poses photographers captured at the entrance. Even after an event, the surveillance and monitoring of styles continued, multiplying the possibilities for fashion judgements. This happened as young women flipped through wedding and funeral albums when visiting an aunt, went through photographs on an android phone; and when they frequently paused videos of life cycle ceremonies to take a closer look at a garment. However, such judgements and observations were not restricted to special occasions. Cheaper textiles meant investments in fashion had increasingly become part of young women's everyday lives. Observations, judgements and copying of each other's styles could happen at collective taxi pickup points, as happened with Annie in the vignette that opened this chapter.

Tina, on a visit to her cousin, asked for her wedding album to show me the dresses she liked:

> Look, Stella's dress at the civil wedding (à la mairie) is sexy and responsible; this is the latest trend; this is what I wore too; the drank blue shades of her pagne match well her dark blue shoes and blue make up; I like the orange lace on her shoulder … it is a new dress because she wears the wedding pagne. Her golden earrings and necklace fit with the orange lace and make her skin tone stand out, this is what hits the eye! Nyanga … Already at the other wedding I noticed she dresses well, I will ask her modèle (style) next time. … (figure 17). But look that person next to her: this kind of tight mini-dress, well she perhaps did not have money for pagne but a civil wedding is not a nightclub! She does not even know how to match it with her hair. She surely is a villager, she had better came in kaba, now no one will respect her [i.e. treat her in a certain manner at the wedding e.g. letting her serve food herself first] … But look at Vicky, she has a Michelle Obama dress style, this is the difference [pointing to the length] between the mini-dress and this one. Vicky has two like this, yellow and violet, it holds her body well (ça la tient bien). When she entered the evening gala e-kie! everyone looked at her [clasping her hands] … she was respected jusqu'à.60

60. On the day of a wedding, three different types of dresses have to be worn: the civil ceremony, church ceremony and evening gala each requires a different dress style. Tina, for example, wore a tight midi-dress (knee length) to the district office for the civil ceremony, then *pagne* to the church; and a voluminous evening dress (*robe de soirée*) to the night gala.



Figure 17. A style stitched from wedding *pagne* to wear at the civil ceremony of a wedding. Shoes were matched to the dress, I was told many times, by choosing the least dominant colour in the *pagne* (here, navy blue) to better bring out the entire look (*ressortir*). Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

Tina conceived of others' style success in terms of their visual and embodied skills to create a unique and alluring appearance and match it with the place they went to. Dress here was understood as close to a costume or a disguise, a canvas on which to display one's skills, an outcome of a craft that, arranged in stylish ways, can grant one respect; hinting at the indeterminate relation between dress and the self. Dress thus operated in ambiguous and uncertain ways: it could index one's status and/or one's creative skills but also own and others' feelings and desires (chapter 2, see below). Young women knew this all too well and exploited it with particular skill and wit (Gondola 1999, Cole 2010).[61]

Compare now the notion of respectability in narratives of older women, like Ma Elize, and younger women's judgments of styles. To dress for respect implies different configurations and meanings of the notion of respect from those tied to procreation and marriage (Sylvanus

61. Indeed, young women advise that the best dress to wear for one's birthday is "to be disguised as a Muslim" (*se déguiser en musulman*) which requires a lot of costly textile, displaying economic achievement, and offers a large canvas to display one's skills (by cutting, matching, arranging the textile in desired ways).

2013). It is from the latter perspective when Rowlands argues that women who ran after fashion in the 1970s and 1980s were not considered as good candidates for marriage (1994). In young women's accounts respect, in contrast, is tied to the skill of dressing fashionably—rather than ideas of domesticity—and can reveal women's industriousness. Dressing for respect thus implies evaluations of crafted surfaces requiring visual and embodied skills (cf. Turner 1980, Miller 2005) that have to be learnt and sustained though practice. In so far as the notion of respect refers to an exterior quality it is produced or denied in a social interaction (Johnson-Hanks 2002:81) and can be materialised through dress. Being respectable means that people must treat you in a certain way and speak to you in a certain manner (Johnson-Hanks 2006); this is achievable through an embodied performance of dress that consists of expertly steering others' gazes to recognise for example the creativity and uniqueness of one's skills and styles, or one's clothing competence (Hansen 2003). To be sure, dressed performance, as an illocutionary act, relies on the uptake of the audience (Austin 1975 [1962]). But in order to deliver such a performance more pragmatic concerns have to be navigated. These include, for example, sustaining a supply of new dresses in economic terms—which, recalling the comments of young men in chapter 1, in itself could reveal women as industrious or skilful at getting by—but also learning the ways in which to arrange garments, keeping abreast of the latest fashions and learning how to walk and pose in a specific manner (chapter 4). In short embodied performance of dress requires skills and competences, an issue to which the following turns.

Fashionistas

One late afternoon I popped by Tina's room and found her sitting on her bed with a catalogue in her hands. I had a length of textile with me and, upon spotting it, she enthusiastically volunteered to help design a dress. She pulled out a Vlisco catalogue (borrowed from an aunt engaged in the *pagne* trade) from under the mattress she slept on and pointed: "Do you see this dress? Look how the shades of her *pagne* [green, white, violet] match well her bag [violet] and her shoes [white]—you should try to match the colour in this way to create resemblance. But also it must contrast well with the tone of your skin: here look she is quite pale so it can make your tone stand out well for you but I am too dark, it will not make my skin stand out well (*ressortir*). Look at these frills! I like this model very much." She photographed the image with her android phone and continued instructing me: "This is a complex model, it is tight you know,

sexy, but also covers your knees, so it is *responsable*. You can wear it to your future work. I would change it a little here [pointing to a bare arm] and add a *manche bouffante* made in lace at this side [pointing to the right]. I would have to change the *pagne* to lighter colours so that it contrasts well with my dark skin, that way it would catch the eye. … add a ribbon here [pointing to the belt]." She saved the photographed image in a folder on her mobile phone titled "office dress". While young women viewed consumption of dress and fashion as a site to assert divisions and claim distinctions, these were considered contextual and dress continued to be a site to manifest one's skill. Improving these skills was considerably helped through their prime apprenticeship tool which was always at hand—the android smartphone with its multiple photographic functions—which became key for young women who wanted to excel in, paraphrasing Hansen (2009), the fashion competence, that formed an integral part of "beauty work".

Another afternoon, I joined Tina at Gwen's sewing shop, who decided to close her mother's stall earlier that day. She opened up an office dress catalogue and showed the seamstress the photo of a dress she had taken another day. Although she was not yet in a financial position to place an order, the discussion of the style began in advance. She explained that she had worked on this style so as to change it a little (*changer un peu*), and to adjust it to her body shape (she demonstrated how) and to the recent fashion she had seen on Fashion TV at her friend's mother's shop which was to reveal one shoulder. It was now a short, body-hugging *pagne* dress with *manches bouffantes* decorated with sequins at the hemline. "This one" Gwen pointed to Tina "always wants complicated models" (*modèles compliqués*), alluding to the creativity and innovation of Tina's dress, which she welcomed only half-heartedly, for it added to her work. However, *modèles compliqués* was what women usually ordered. Two other women were present at Gwen's and one asked if she could see the style. Tina passed her the mobile phone and the woman exclaimed: "Wow! I want this *modele (style)* too." Tina tried to send her the style via Bluetooth but it did not work. Instead, Gwen came up with the idea of printing out the photograph at the neighbouring copy shop which was open late. In the shop, the female employee connected the phone to the computer and scanned through the numerous catalogues it contained: everyday dress, evening dress, wedding dress, birthday dress, funeral dress, office dress, sports outfit. Upon opening the appropriate file, she marvelled: "Wow! Can I copy that?" Tina left a copy of the style behind and carried two prints back to the sewing shop. Giving one print to the other woman she explained the details of the dress at length until Gwen chased

everyone away; she had to close down the workshop, and told Tina goodbye "*à demain fashionista*".

A fashionista was a young woman who invested considerable economic and social resources in following fashions, with each style hunt being patient and well-organised enterprise based on acute "fashion competence" (Hansen 2005), and who gained followers based on her knowledge and expertise, acting as a trendsetter. She exceled in the visual skills of matching garments so that they "hit the eye", displaying them in an appropriate manner, knowing what was in fashion and how to innovate, recognising the quality of textiles by feel, look and price, and dressing appropriately for each milieu. If she built a certain amount of cultural capital therein (Bourdieu 1986), she could attempt to convert it into social relations (Piot 1999, 1991, Guyer 1993). Such relations were built around shared sensibilities and sensory experiences, constituting what Meyer in another contexts calls "aesthetic formations" based on "aesthetics of persuasion" (2010) here, the allure that dresses exercised. By collecting, displaying and circulating her styles on the phone—wherein photographs were her advertisements—or while wearing them, the fashionista aimed to make others dependent on her for style advice (i.e. become followers), but in doing so, also generated competitors. When those of higher status and rank (e.g. married woman) were made envious and desired to imitate young women, the figure of the fashionista reveals other workings of "fashion systems" than those described in Western contexts. That is, fashion did not only operate as a system of distinction between classes where those from the bottom imitated those from the top (chapter 1); rather, fashion as material surface generated sensations or affective states that brought women of various social statuses and ranks together (cf. Simmel 1957 [1904, cf. Veblen 1953 [1899], cf. Bourdieu 1984).

In Yaoundé, young women worked to improve their skills and competences—that is their clothing habitus (Craik 1994, Bourdieu 1977, Mauss 1973 [1935])— through socialisation from an early age (figure 18). Many kids accompanied their mothers, aunts and grandmothers to their seamstresses and observed prolonged discussions and arguments about details of styles, social codes and what was in or out of fashion. Those who attended Catholic schools received instruction in dress design. I observed many girls sitting at a table at home, drawing, for example, a birthday dress in pencil in a notebook dedicated for this purpose. Each sketch was made with precision and elaboration, and sat alongside homework competitions for other subjects. Impressed by Tina's younger sister's drawing of a dress, I stared at it at length as her

mother noted as she passed: “she draws dresses very well, her sister did the same at her age, not everyone can do this!” That dress design was a part of the school curriculum was a relic of mission schooling which had incorporated sewing and crocheting as skills to be learnt by future housewives; indeed, most of the older seamstress I knew learnt sewing at mission schools. State high schools in turn held fashion competitions on their premises. Young women would walk around school courtyards to display the styles they designed and stitched—almost all women I knew had a photograph from such an event in their albums from the 2000s. Thus, clothing competence, to use Hansen’s term, was exercised and encouraged from a young age through both formal and informal socialisation (cf. Craik 1994), its gendered dimension in particular influenced by a specific French colonial and missionary inheritance.[62]



Figure 18. Tina (main image, left) and her younger sister (main image, right). Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2019)

The young women I worked with continued in different ways to develop their skills in transforming their clothing competence into fashion competence. Annie, for example, scrolled through images of stars and celebrities on Facebook using her brother’s computer. She studied

62. The majority of older tailors I interviewed learnt their trade in colonial enterprises.

fashion advice blogs and columns on clothing companies' websites at length throughout any breaks during the day, while waiting for something to cook, or sitting in a taxi when running errands for an elder. She surveilled new second-hand items and models displayed outside shops (*nouvel arrivage*), photographing them with her phone as we walked along busy roads instead of taking a collective taxi ride home; this Annie like other women explained, allowed to save money for new garments. Some young women would sit in a friendly sewing shop, not to have a dress stitched but to flip through catalogues, photograph them and categorise them for themselves, much as Bene did with hair extensions and styles in chapter 1 (figure 19). Others would search You Tube for recent fashion shows in Paris or Milan. They would observe what other clients ordered to discern what was now fashion and to advise them. At times, young women went into shops to check out how dresses are made, turning garments inside out to verify the type of stitching and the finish until the owner (less often the seller) would spot that this was not the first time they had come in, and chase them away. Almost all the young women I knew classified photographs or downloaded images into personal catalogues. As such they created not only their own distinctive and unique styles but unique collections into which they kept integrating the latest styles (*nouvel arrivage*). It is this integration of 'the latest' and the skills to arrange 'the latest' into unique styles that differentiated those with fashion competence from those who merely had clothing competence.

Apart from ongoing investment in skills, making it as a fashionista relied on having or developing certain relationships (see also next section). Having a close kin who could stitch dresses for them on credit, who sold *pagnes* or owned a clothing shop considerably facilitated access to textiles and knowledge of fashion. Tina, for example, had an aunt who worked in a clothing shop at the centre of Yaoundé and who knew what was the latest and newest thanks to the shop's involvement in importing and selling clothes from Turkey and Dubai. Tina often went to help her out at the shop. She also had an uncle who traded in *pagnes* and who taught her to differentiate between qualities of *pagne* and to discern their provenance through touch. She learnt this while helping him unpack and categorise newly arrived textiles at his stand. Her mother's sister was a seamstress and would stitch her nieces' dresses on credit, something many seamstresses would do. Thus, if among young Bamiléké women in Yaoundé becoming a fashionista was "hard work" (Hansen 2005)—echoing the dress and stylish investments described elsewhere on the continent (e.g Sylvanus 2016, Newell 2012, Masquelier 2013) and beyond (e.g. Jones 2007, Tarlo and Moors 2013)—this work, I suggest, entailed learning visual

skills, updating fashion knowledge, and engaging in informal apprenticeships with kin which required both patience and practice and which were facilitated by android phones.

Engaging in such hard work potentially offered many benefits—recall how Tina spoke about Vicky receiving respectful treatment for her fashionability as we viewed the wedding album. Other young women said collective taxis were more likely to stop to collect them when they wore *sexy mais responsable* clothing and drivers would also accept lower fares than average (250 FCFA). Concomitantly, dressing sexy, they noticed, made for longer waits at the collective taxi pickup points, except at night when sexy attire meant one was going to a night club, that is, dressing appropriately for the social context what in turn guaranteed respect. Thus, fashionability had a performative efficacy (Bastian 2013, Austin 1975 [1962]) wherein embodied performance of dress style—an outcome not, as Newell argues for Ivorian *nouchi*, of deceptive illusion but of a skill for crafting surfaces embedded in dress—produced respectful treatment itself (2012:5). It is also here that fashionistas I worked with differed from *sapeurs* Gondola describes: it was precisely because dresses and the corporeal transformations they afford did not only conceal but rather revealed—young women's skills and fashion competence—that accounted for their social efficacy and afforded upward social mobility and success.

But fashionable style could bring on more than respectful treatment. It invited more tangible opportunities and benefits that came when one's fashionability was displayed, appreciated and recognised. For example, Manuela and Vanessa were offered—independently of each other—jobs as hostesses at promotion events for the Cameroonian beer company Brasseries de Cameroun and the telecommunication company Orange respectively, while waiting at a taxi pick up point at the university campus. Both explained to me that they were recruited because they wore unique garments that manifested their skills in fashion, style and display. In other words, the display of a dress advertised the skills (cf. Newell 2012, cf. Sylvanus 2013) that young women reckoned were required at promotional events, for they demonstrated an ability to arrange garments in such an alluring way so as to call attention and seduce passers-by: their skill in what Benjamin called display value of commodity (in Buck-Morss 1991). Many other fashionistas I knew were aware of the upward social mobility opportunities that dress display might bring, thus they kept investing in them, marketing and advertising their styles through photographs collected on their phones— an issue to which the following turns.

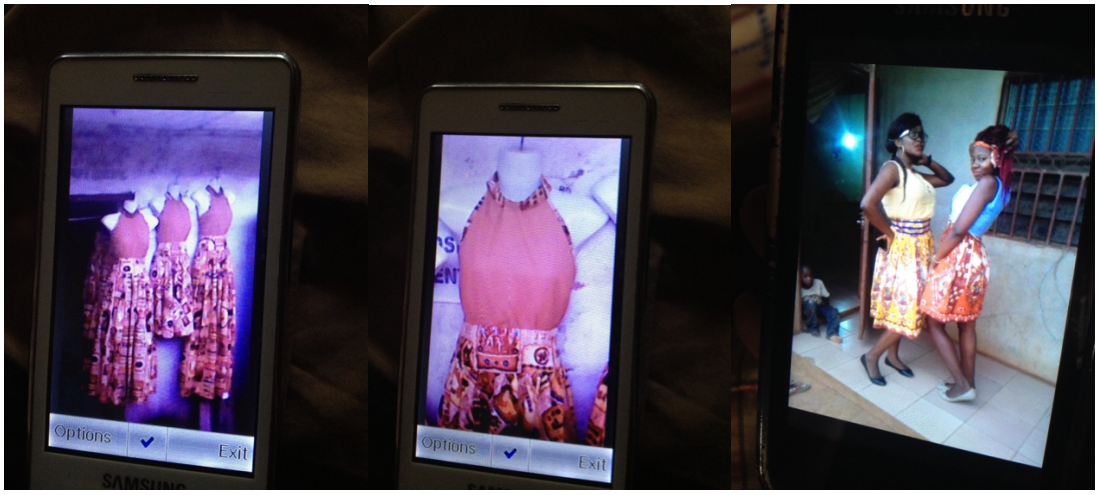


Figure 19. Photographs collected for inspiration (left and centre) to devise a unique style for Women's Day, and the actual outcome (right). These two young women are intimate friends (*amies intimes*) and manifest this through their similar styles (cut), while maintaining their differences and uniqueness through the colours used. This way of sameness-and-difference was a usual way for *amies intimes* to dress. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

Wealth in followers

Many young women desired to convert their fashion competence: that is, expertise, skills and specialist knowledge into other benefits. The ways in which they aimed to do so entailed exchange. This might range from offering advice on, for example, the particular shade of a colour or aspects of a style to match another; through recommending which seamstresses specialises in a given style; to setting up WhatsApp groups through which photographs of styles were circulated amongst others. By collecting, displaying and circulating her styles on the phone—wherein photographs were her advertisements—or while wearing them, the fashionista aimed to make others feel indebted and dependent on her for style advice i.e. become her followers (Guyer 1993, Guyer and Belinga 1995). Sharing of skills and knowledge was also intended to turn followers into conduits for the circulation of images beyond her own networks, in view of enhancing the fashionista's fame (Munn 1988).

Annie, for example, set up one such group which she named "*Habit de jour*" to, as she explained, teach others what makes for a successful "day dress", and invited four classmates to join (figure 20). Members were also invited from among friends she considered intimate (*amies intimes*), as well as other young women from the university who were from wealthier families than her. Majority of these young women did not know each other. She regularly sent

images of her new styles to the group, often zooming onto the details of the dress at the expense of the face, and responded to questions from others about which garment to match with which, which shade or colour would fit better one's skin tone, which star to imitate and how to change one's style a little (*changer un peu*) to make it unique and in accordance with latest fashions. The advice she shared also included images illustrating what not to wear and what kind of clothing arrangements to avoid. Her advice followed aesthetic principles of creating a contrast—marrying the shades and garments to "create resemblance that catches the eye" (*bien marier pour frapper*), and "wearing what is appropriate to certain contexts" (*s'habiller en fonction du lieu*). At times Annie would ostentatiously praise her followers but also scrutinize in detail their garments and loudly criticise others when walking with a follower at the university campus. This gained her the nickname "Fashion Police", echoing the sense of discipline of older generations with regards to beauty and dress that previous chapters described but also common style and fashion policing among youth worldwide.



Figure 20. Examples of styles circulated on WhatsApp groups at school. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

The ways in which the dress-sharing groups were constituted followed certain rules and hierarchies. Some of these hierarchical rules loosely resembled those in all-female village associations for married woman (see introduction).[63] Fashionistas kept track of their followers' garments and monitored how often, where and when they wore each garment. Followers might be admonished for wearing a garment the wrong way or on the wrong occasion. This would displease their fashionable mentor who might punish them; similarly, female associations

63. Young women attended associations meeting sporadically from a young age and learnt the rules and hierarchies through observation and socialisation.

would fine their members for wearing the association uniform on days other than those when meetings were held. Followers were also organised in hierarchies where latecomers had to make special efforts to earn advice and attention from the fashionista by displaying their own knowledge of styles and skills. Whereas tensions often characterised the fashionista's relations with the group, they provided her with occasions to assert her skills and consolidate her position in the hierarchy and reputation by providing expert advice. Followers in turn often offered something in return, should the gift—an actual garment, a printed image or a verbal recommendation—meet their needs (Piot 1999). The gift might be a part of *pagne* in return for advise on a style of dress for a funeral which brought acclaim for the wearer; drinks after a follower made a successful appearance at an event for which the fashionista gave advice on how to wear a dress (chapter 4); or taxi money if she accompanied the follower to a seamstress. Fashionistas in turn often invested these gifts further in their next styles. In many cases, this happened between young women despite meagre means, however fashionistas also actively marketed their styles among married woman or women of higher status.

Tina found the opportunity to do this when she took a temporary job at a local internet service provider. Finding herself among strangers of superior social status, for months she adopted highly fashionable garments and created alluring appearances (figure 21). These took a long time to craft every day, starting at dawn. She carefully matched her shoes with dresses, and bags with shoes, and set her hair, in order to create a desirable style to catch her new colleagues' eyes (*bien marier pour frapper*). In the beginning, her appearance was observed in silence. Over the course of a few weeks, however, she became the centre of attention and her looks were commented upon and greeted with exclamations. As soon as she entered the premises of the enterprise, she was asked to come to her colleagues' desks, so they could feel her garments and take a closer look. She was asked for advice on how to put on make-up that lasted throughout the day, as hers did, something she learnt through tutorials on You Tube. She offered to take other women to a reliable seamstress and sent around pictures of dress styles via Messenger (figure 22). A few months into the job, women would gather around her desk to discuss a style printed in colour on paper which she annotated with, for example, details of colour and names of decoration, type of stitching and cuts. Often, she would stand up and walk around to show how to wear a particular garment. She brought women together through shared acts of image consumption that worked in ways akin to acts of commensality, revealing that the "ideal of sharing has been extended out of range of food and drink to consumables in general and in particular those that signify modernity" (Rowlands 1994:159).



Figure 21. An example of a style for work. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2018)



Figure 22. An example of a style a young woman circulated among work colleagues on social networks. Note how the beads across the back resemble her hair, while the folds in the skirt create volume. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2019)

If Tina came to be treated with respect by fellow employees who were higher in rank, this stood in contrast to the ways other young women in the office were treated. This became evident, for example, in how drinks were shared. She was often served at the same time as the married women and the secretary, who occupied the highest position due to her proximity to the boss.

She was asked to join discussions regarding, for example, preparations for the Labour Day celebrations, from which other women with her junior status were excluded. During Women's Day celebrations she was invited to travel in the same car as the married women with children. She was respected at the office because she was stylish, despite being unmarried and with no children. If this worked, it is because Tina's gifts meet their needs (Piot 1999). As married woman, they wanted to keep their husbands (*garder son mari*) which was possible, they reckoned, through *sexy mais responsable* styles. If married women had the advantage of a spouse who could pay for expensive textiles, they had less time to search online and devise new styles. In face of their obligations, married woman often looked to younger women for advice about new styles, not only to keep their husbands, but also for special events and occasions, as Tina's colleagues did at her work. Thus, fashion allowed hierarchies to be challenged, making married women the wealth in followers of unmarried women, who were, in other contexts, their social juniors. Moreover, wealthy and married women offered substantial economic and social benefits to fashionistas, which young women could either invest further in their own fashion enterprises but also distribute onwards to their own kin.

Thus, one young woman, for example, mentioned a relationship with a pharmacist who copied her styles and this allowed her to obtain a hard-to-find medicine for her kin. Another mentioned a male trader in phones who copied her styles for his wife and sold phones to her at a heavy discount, which she bought for her kin. In their best months, the most successful fashonistas could receive 20,000–80,000 FCFA and/or several *pagnes*, especially in the dry season which abounded with ceremonies for which new styles were requested. For Tina in particular, towards end of my fieldwork, her skills and knowledge, she told me, translated into material benefits, as two key women in the company helped her to be confirmed in her position and enabled a transfer to a higher grade. Although young women welcomed this help, Tina was also suspicious and questioned the motivations of her new "fashion friends" as disguised jealousy and competition, and a desire to get rid of her because her reputation in the company was rising. Thus, Tina warned me, you can never be sure how far you can rely on these relations (cf. Geschiere 2013), recalling Rowland's argument that a fear of failure emphasises autonomy and unwillingness to trust others (1995:112). Then, unlike Congolese *sapeurs* in Paris that Newell describes, young women's networks of style did not function as a form of para-kinship (2016). Rather, young women sought to keep their "fashion friends" at a distance (cf. Gilbert 2018).

That is, rather than have someone come to one's place, to take the dress and borrow it or copy it, or having to come and display the dress at school, one could just send an image from home on Messenger or WhatsApp thanks to android phones (cf. Gilbert 2018). This allowed *filles androides* to conceal their garments from kin and intimate kin (i.e. prevent someone from visiting you in order to borrow the style) in an environment where such practices are common. It also circumvented proper apprenticeships for other women could not come and sit alongside the fashionista as she drew out garments at home, nor could they turn the garment inside-out to examine the stitching. To be sure, borrowing personal possessions signified close friendship and young women refrained from doing so with strangers considering all the risks intimacy might bring (Geschiere 2013, Gilbert 2018). Sharing styles using Bluetooth or over the internet enabled them, at least in part, to protect themselves and keep others at distance, without revealing where they lived or without having someone come to borrow the garment, or see how they learn their skills. Thus, android phones also enhanced the possibility of concealing one's fashion knowledge and skills (Archambault 2017).

Annie, for her part, owned a splendid wedding garment (figure 23). It was rare for a young woman to have such a garment and she proudly described to me the time it took her to design it and which aspects gave it her unique touch. Tired of waiting for her teacher training diploma, she dressed in that garment and ventured to the ministry to pick up the diploma herself, despite the warnings of her colleagues that she would be told off and would hear that diplomas were being printed (implying a bribe would be needed, at least). Recounting the story to the other graduates a few days later, she boasted about her style: "I passed in front of all the others in the queue as the secretary called me *grande dame*! When I was about to leave she asked where I had parked my car [meaning, asked if Annie needed help to get out of a crowded parking space] whereas I came there by foot!" The secretary was impressed, Annie continued, by her style and asked if she could photograph it, and Annie agreed with pride. She explained to me later on that what the secretary appreciated was Annie's ability to dress well. This in turn, granted respectful treatment and opened up an opportunity which Annie seized. Annie offered to exchange phone numbers and few months later told me she took the secretary to her seamstress, while the secretary promised to see what possible to be done about Annie's future: where and when she would be assigned a teaching post. Indeed Annie got the job, in the location she wanted.



Figure 23. A wedding garment style which helped Annie get her diploma from the ministry. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

Needless to say, Annie shared this particular style on her WhatsApp group for graduates from her year, and received requests from persons she said she did not know, asking her for a close up of this successful style—a style that could get you a diploma in no time. To be sure, Annie herself ensured that these requests were made known to others, thus confirming the exceptionality of her style. Thus, stories became attached to styles as they circulated over digital social networks. The ways in which photographs of styles persuaded others, and were copied and enhanced the reputation of a fashionista, echoes the classical anthropological discussions of fame in the Kula ring exchange of the Trobriand Islands (Malinowski 1993 [1922], Munn 1986, Miller 2005). Like Kula traders, young women were well aware that the members of a WhatsApp group are both desired targets to be made to feel indebted, as well as conduits for styles to circulate to new potential followers (ibid). In Munn's terms (1986), what young women desired was to create a network in which they could enhance their fame, garner them respect, and open up new paths for upward mobility, in this case through the fame of their styles shared over the phone. The fame of a given style, while underpinned by skills and fashionability required for production, was enhanced by stories that the circulating object

accumulated. The circulating object achieved a fame that was transferred onto the person who designed it and the person's fame increased the fame of the style. Differently from the Kula rings, at stake here was the expansion of individuals through their styles, thereby expanding the fame of the entity—or brand—that young women identified with, in this case, fashionistas (cf. Foster 2008). If nothing ensured that a follower would not claim a style for herself, the fashionista's superior knowledge and skills and crucially her refusal to give up possession of the garment often made others return to her with detailed questions about the photographed style.

But if young women managed to keep strangers at distance, at times a kin or an intimate friend could render an unexpected visit. Tina, for example, displayed one of her recent Michelle Obama styles at her sister's wedding. Subsequently a cousin visiting her at home next week asked to borrow it. Most of the time, if young women avoided sharing the actual garments even with their sisters and kin, it was because this wealth in things materialised important social relations, such as the dress from the funeral of an important relative, or a *pagne* offered by a lover as a gift, that young women did not want to part with (Cole 2010). Yet Tina found a way out of fulfilling her cousin's request by claiming the dress had already been taken—which only heightened its appeal. Instead, she sent her cousin an image of the dress and advice where to make it and a video of how to wear it. She could match her body shape and practice how to wear it with the video—bring out its lines without exposing the body (*faire ressortir ses lignes sans toutefois exposer son corps*)—and deliver an alluring performance that the cousin later boasted about for weeks. That this was accepted, I suggest, reveals that what was valued was indeed young women's knowledge of fashion and skills, rather than attempts to reveal them as not owing the garment (cf. Newell 2012, Sylvanus 2013). Ultimately, giving photos and advice was considered better as it met the recipient's desire (Piot 1999). The cousin reciprocated by giving Tina a full-length *pagne* of the event she went to out of which she made a new style.

But, young women were also aware that the distribution of garments and styles created jealousy and competition. Copying styles potentially enabled others to enlarge their style repertoires, allowing new fashionistas to enter the game and seek to outdo one another. Thus, if young women shared parts of their skills and knowledge, they concealed others. If giving advice on how to tweak a garment meant that others could learn how to create the allure that the fashionista generated around herself, it was young women who decided what to share and what to conceal: for example, one could bring a follower not to the same seamstress who stitched

the dress and who specialised in this particular style. Tina for example saved her forthcoming styles in the catalogue called *prive* (private) so that to prevent others from asking to open this catalogue, as they were scrolling through her folders sitting in front of the computer at work, to which the phone was connected. Annie, in turn, told her kin for weeks that "I'm hiding a very new style for a special occasion" and messaged her followers via WhatsApp warning of a new "unique style that will impress even the President's wife". But when asked to borrow this style by an intimate friend, she used the same ruse as Tina above, claiming it has already been taken. Keeping garments in concealment or performing concealment generated value and heightened garment's exceptionality and desirability by others (Weiner 1992). Thus, maintaining the reputation of a fashionista was animated by competing dynamics of distribution and retention, reinforcing young women's vigilance towards their own and others' skills and styles (cf. Dosekun 2017).

Yet, at times, fashionistas could be challenged. Recall Annie's WhatsApp group Habille de Jour. One day Annie became angry with one of her followers who had dared to circulate a new style before her. Normally it was up to Annie to post new styles, be asked for advice and so on, so she saw this as lack of respect, an overt challenge to her reputation. She pondered whether to delete the follower from the group but ultimately decided to punish her by refusing to share a dress with her, ignoring her at the campus and at times, with two other members of the group loudly and overtly mocking her styles. Annie deleted her from the group but not from her contacts. Annie explained that the other young women will now anyway not follow Annie's fashions because this would strain her own pride. She kept her in her contacts because as she said this left a possibility for the other women to redeem herself later. For Annie, I suggest, it was a way of maintaining wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). Similar risks were entailed in a refusal to follow an advice or a refusal to share an image of the style. This could be interpreted in terms of the challenge to the relationship, signalling its imminent end, leading to much despair and fear. As much as fashionable dress could bring young women together, it could also push them apart. Challenging a fashonista had high coasts, and seeing how a fashionista could shame others made her followers less daring.

As young women aimed to balance distribution and retention, they were guided by how far a particular follower could open up a chance for upward social mobility e.g. through being helped to find a job, through being invited to an important event, or through receiving a financial contribution or set of *pagnes* from them. If, when engaging in such distribution, young women

admitted that particular people were especially desirable as followers—not only those higher in the social hierarchy but also those whose particular positions, skills and knowledge. For example, if Tina had followers at all positions in the office hierarchy, this was because different followers could be useful for different purposes (Piot 1999, Guyer 1993). Having a woman who was a guard at the office entrance as a follower allowed Tina to access the office when she wanted to use internet in the evening. But she explained to me that she would have brought her to the specialist seamstress in one highly desirable style, as she did, after much thinking, with the secretary who helped her with a transfer to a higher position. However, because young women did not know when a relation could bear fruits or what opportunities it could bring, in general they shared styles to gather many different relations in view of ensuring their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). Thus, if as Cole observes in Madagascar (2004), consumer goods are also about seeking to build particular kinds of relationships that can bring the adult status that youth desires, it is not only through consumption but also through distribution and circulation, I suggest, that fashionistas created and maintained their reputation and converted it into social relations in view of attaining social adulthood.

This also concerned young women's kin. Recall Tina's style, resembling Michele Obama's, which she wore to a wedding. Needless to say, such occasions ensured vast audiences and were thus real fashion shows, attracting numerous most splendid and creative styles. At weddings, young women walked slowly to display their styles, observed each other and tried to make sure they displayed their own style better than the fashionista who had entered the wedding evening gala just before them and was acclaimed by many a 'wow!'. Staging such a fashionable entry into the venue could be rewarded by money. The latter was a common Cameroonian practice of *farotage*, that is, of praising performer's skills and appearance, echoing the practices of receiving gifts for dances staged by their grandmothers (chapter 1, see also chapter 4). At such events young women could thus competed for accumulation of economic and social resources. As young women came into the event premises and checked to see who wore what and how many eyes followed whom, who gave money to whom, their actions resonate with Divine Fuh's ideas of "competition for attention" (2009, 2012, Foster 2006) denoting a conspicuous quest for recognition "where accumulating prestige through performative acts becomes a replacement for old predictabilities and traditional fulfilments of personhood such as those offered by school-to-work transitions" (2012:6). The key role Fuh (2009, 2012) attributes to what I call crafting resonates with my argument that femininity, rather than being interior essence (Butler 1990), is simultaneously the *skill* for crafting surface and the *substance* of that

crafted surface. If the young men Fuh describes in Bamenda "compete for attention" (ibid.) through football associations, young women here competed with each other to place themselves in the public space through the display of fashion and styles to open up opportunities (see also chapter 4). This is because the display of fashionable styles was evaluated in terms of skills in display of styles as well as industriousness, thus signalling a capacity for amassing the resources necessary for engagement in the acts of reciprocal social exchange that define respectable forms of social adulthood (Warnier 2007, Rowlands 1994, Cole 2004). That is, through performative acts of fashionable display, the fashionista confirmed to herself and to others, especially her kin, her capacity for, and pursuit of, social adulthood.

If at such events some young women actively marketed their styles by approaching certain kin or persons of status or wealth, more successful fashionistas also opened themselves up to the possibility of their garments being claimed by an aunt, cousin or a close friend at such kin-dense event. Indeed, when asked by older aunts for their styles young women also aimed to gave them advice but admitted they would not be able to refuse if asked to lend the actual garment. This is because in such circumstances, young women had to made sure their personal achievement—embedded in the dress styles—benefited others, especially those who contributed to young women's upbringing (e.g. through financial contributions to their education). As scholars of the Grassfields have argued, personal success is considered destructive unless it benefits others (Nyjamjoh 2002: 119, Rowlands 1994). Sharing actual garments acknowledged that young women did not keep their wealth (self-fashioning knowledge, skills and garments) to themselves, but benefited others. This also dissipated suspicions of witchcraft insofar as it is related to selfish wealth accumulation. Thus, the products of success, i.e. fashionable dresses, when shared were a sign of good intentions (Rowlands 1994) while their success was legitimised. Indeed, fashionistas' kin at weddings spoke of their styles with pride, explaining that seeing their daughters dressed and *farotes* thus—Tina left the ceremony with 30,000 FCFA—and being asked for their garments and advice, served to reassure them about the young women's future achievements.

When a young woman dressed to impress, her acts of consumption and acquisition and circulation that rely on skills and knowledge (cf. Jarrin 2017) became visual strategies for advancing socially and evaluating personal success, rather than simply personal acts of self-gratification. Through dress, a fashionista temporarily inverted hierarchies and established a temporary "matronage" network around herself as women—even married women with

children—asked her for advice and attention. Through such acts of sharing young women could produce real social transformations, increasing their hierarchical superiority through reputation based on skills and knowledge rather than on social status or rank (cf. Bourdieu 1986) and accumulating substantial social and economic resources. Recalling Jua's arguments about Cameroonian youth redefining their fields of possibilities (2003), we see here how success depended on a reconfigured form of cultural capital. When a fashionista created her network and maintained followers relying on skills and knowledge she owned, we can see how she could, as Tina said, not only wear but literally "be fashion" (*etre fashion*) (Gondola 1999).

Thus, distribution was as highly valued as consumption because being the one to start a trend—being a fashionista—held more cultural capital than simply being fashionable (Bourdieu 1986). Distributing trends over android phones allowed young women not only to create a reputation but also to enhance it and convert it into social relations; that is, to accumulate wealth in followers (Guyer 1993, Guyer and Belinga 1995). Because the embodied performance of dress worked as a technology of enchantment, it produced certain effects of allure or glamour for the self and for the other (effects that were intensified through the enunciation of awe, the "wow!"). But, as a photo of a dress was further circulated over social networks on android phones, the material qualities that mediated bodies in certain ways were replicated, reproducing enchantment itself (cf. Munn 1986, cf. Sylvanus 2016, cf. Benjamin 1992 [1939]).[64] That is, displayed garments and circulating dresses allowed for similar engagement on the part of viewers, engaging them in a sensory way, offering experiences of pleasure and imaginary explorations (Thrift 2008). In other words, followers were formed as aesthetic communities gathering around shared sensibilities. That is, the garments that Tina's married colleagues copied made them feel they would be able to keep their husbands by wearing these styles; those who copied Annie's garment felt they could obtain their diploma too; aunts at the wedding who borrowed a fashionista's style felt that they would impress others by displaying it at other venues (though often young women failed to show them how to display it!). Young men who saw these fashonistas enter the night gala hall like celebrities and stars were, in turn, made to desire an affective relationship with them (chapter 2) and/or to believe in marriage for love (chapter 5). In short, aesthetic communities (ibid), be they in the form of wealth in men or wealth in followers, were a product of technologies of enchantment (Gell 1988).

64. This was at times exploited consciously by young women as when they sensed a jealous competitor might raise suspicions of them if they offered to share their superior style.

The power to attract and attach others draws not only from exchange, but equally from use value: young women's photographs met the desires of her "customers", whether kin or peers generating and reiterating specific feelings (cf. Piot 1999). Building a reputation as a fashionista resembles strategies of advertising and marketing which aim to create value through desires and experiences that customer (peer, stranger, kin) identifies with the brand (fashionista) (cf. Mazarella 2003, cf. Foster 2008). In other words, immaterial value was as key to young women's fashionable endeavours as it is to aesthetic capitalism itself (chapter 2, cf. Tonda 2005, Illouz 2007, 2017). As photographs circulated, that is, as a fashionista advertised her styles, and as others wore her style, allure was cast onto the fashionista's reputation, enhancing her and her style's fame (cf. Munn 1986). Thus, she derived value from others wearing her style, others feeling their desires were being met. When others aimed to outdo her, they were often not able to; her fame, like that of a brand, relied on the skills that she owned and concealed.

Conclusion

In this chapter I examined the ways in which young women visually fashion themselves as respectable through dress styles. The first section was concerned with popular discourses on female moral respectability circulating in contemporary Cameroon. These forms, the section suggested, are framed in terms of reproductive labour and marriage, echoing the discourses of church, chiefdom and state (Goheen 1996, Johnson-Hanks 2006, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999). For young women stuck in waithood, such forms of respectability are largely unavailable given their economic predicament and unmarried status. Thus, the section suggested that young women draw on alternative ways to elicit respectability related to skills invested in fashion and dress (cf. Sylvanus 2013).

The second section, looked at how young women train their skills and knowledge, that is their fashion competence (cf. Hansen 2013). It showed how women displaying fashionable styles can garner not only respectful treatment but also more substantial economic opportunities. In doing so the section highlighted how fashionability (Hansen and Madison 2013) is an outcome of young women's skill in crafting unique garments, recognising certain contexts and displaying their dresses accordingly. Crucially this entails learning through apprenticeship (cf.

Craik 1994), often involving kin, making fashion competence a crucial component of beauty work.

But if display can bring about social opportunities, young women actively aim to enhance them. The third section looked into how young women build reputations and gather social relations by sharing their skills and images of styles, often through digital means. The section suggested that young women circulate images of styles in view of gathering "wealth in followers" (cf. Guyer and Belinga 1995) who are pulled together on the basis of shared sensibilities ie. as aesthetic formations (Meyer 2010). As young women circulate their styles over android phones, such circulation reiterates enchantment generated by the styles (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1937]). That is, copying of styles allow followers to feel that their desires will be fulfilled (cf. Piot 1999) be it maintaining a relationship or obtaining a diploma. Answering the main thesis question about what visual self-fashioning does and affords women to do, this section shows how dress affords young women ways to build up a respectable reputation and alter social positions, gathering relations that can translate into upward mobility.

Throughout the chapter has approached of dress styles from the perspective of skills and sensations and in doing so broadened scholarly discussions on dress beyond the questions about the efficacy of dress display to questions about dress circulation. That is, I have shown how female relationships are made, re-made and unmade through sharing of fashionable dress styles. Thus, where this thesis argues beauty work consists in objectifying female bodies for display and is a set of skills, this chapter has focused on how this skill is embedded in dressmaking and argued that young women fashion their reputations as fashionistas in social relations through the dress styles they wear and share.



Figure 24. Series of photographs taken at the studio as young woman came to “photograph her clothes”. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

FOUR:

Fashioning hope

The flashing red letters of the Fashion Photos studio could not escape one's attention as one passed through busy Ngusso junction in the northern district of Yaoundé. The newly refurbished building, painted in pea green, stood out amidst the grey, unfinished buildings surrounding it. The studio was situated on the first floor and the way to it, up the stairs, was accompanied by increasingly loud music coming from a speaker next to the glass entrance. Below the flashy lettering an enormous portrait photograph of a young woman with an elaborate hairdo and makeup was displayed. I had observed many young women sighing over that image as we were stuck together in the morning traffic on the way to Yaoundé II University. Crossing the glass door, one entered a dim, chilly space, with a chequered tile floor and a plasma screen for clients to view photographs and choose those they wished to have printed. A loop of images imposed itself upon the clients seated on plastic chairs in the waiting area. Like most studios, the space was divided into two parts. At the front was a till and waiting area where photographic work was exhibited; the display today consisted mainly of images of women, often close-ups or half-portraits with a unicolour background arrayed alongside the plasma screen (figure 25). The backroom was most often filled with camera lamps and backgrounds, occasionally with other decoration, and a small space for preparation and changing. The preparation space was equipped with a chair, table and a mirror with Hollywood-style bulbs over it. A narrow corridor led from the waiting area to the backroom.



F

Figure 25. Display inside the studio with a plasma screen on which clients can view their images (left) and photographs of women (right). Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2015)

"These are photographs of stars," Adelaide said, evaluating the displayed images as we crossed the threshold. A young male photographer, Valery, came to Adelaide from the waiting area. She immediately stood up and hurried to the changing space. Sitting on the chair, she glanced over her image in the mirror and then leaned to pull a set of neatly folded *pagnes* out of the plastic bag she carried. She was dressed in a fashionable tight-fitting *ensemble*[65] of trousers and top stitched for her cousin's wedding the previous month, which she had failed to attend. Once she had groomed her hair with a comb and enhanced her make-up with pink lipstick that matched the shade of her *pagne*, she entered the main studio. She held an android phone in one hand and a shiny imitation leather handbag in the other. I looked around: the walls were plain, blending with the shiny floor. "Where are the backgrounds?" I asked as the young photographer came in. He pointed to a set of rolled-up projector screens attached to the ceiling and proudly demonstrated the electronic mechanism. A series of backgrounds flickered onto the screen: sceneries of holiday destinations, busy city streets with skyscrapers and others showing luxurious villas with cars parked outside. Adelaide meanwhile walked around the studio, her gait resembling a model's walk. "Are you *filming* me?" she impatiently asked the photographer whose eyes were glued to Adelaide's splendid appearance. He said, "You are beautiful!" "Give me a '*poster*'" she impatiently answered. He began directing her, telling her how to contort her body for two consecutive shoots, advising her where to place her hands, directing her eyes to avoid reflections, and suggesting she turn her body at an appropriate angle so as to better expose the contours of her dress. Later, Adelaide came up with plenty of other such *posters* herself.

During our excursion to the studio that day Adelaide returned to the changing room three times. "I haven't filmed this dress yet," she said, putting on a sexy style. The garment resembled a dress Beyoncé had worn in a videoclip we had watched together. Adelaide had photographed the TV screen and showed the image to a seamstress to have a similar model stitched. Returning for her last show to the main studio space she was once more admired by the photographer: "Here comes the red carpet!" Continuing her star-like performance Adelaide smiled and greeted the imaginary audience she saw in front of her as she carefully stepped onto the imagined red carpet. She now seemed to be more confident about her body and moves. "I saw Beyoncé once, it must have been some show, she walked like this and that, have you seen that?" she asked the photographer who, instead of replying, told her to freeze and took several shots, always against a uniform blue background. Finally, she went back to the changing room

65. A two-piece garment, usually a suit but may also be a dress and jacket.

and dressed in the casual *kaba portefeuille* she had come in, folding all three garments for the shoot neatly into the plastic bag, tied a careful knot and went back to the waiting room. “The film is over” she said and sat down on a chair to await the prints (figure 26).



Figure 26. Photo shoot at the studio with a backdrop. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2014)

Whereas such studio excursions were rather occasional enterprises, most of my young informants engaged in at least one such performance during my fieldwork. However, these outings required both time and money, and young women I worked with repeatedly stated they were lacking in both. Instead, they found ways to stage similar performances if not at the studio, then, for example, in relatives’ gardens, when a fellow student-turned-photographer was

passing by; or at a life-cycle ceremony where close kin were persuaded to act as photographers with an android phone. Though some young women went to studios in twos or threes, not least because this allowed them to exchange dresses and thus have more images to choose from, most said their preference was to stage a studio performance on their own. Alone or in a group, these performances were far from the quick flutter of the photographic shutter. Rather, they were slow, encapsulated by the bodies moving slowly "as if" on the red carpet, and necessitated time as several changes of appearances were involved. Young women usually struck as many poses as the combination of dresses and backgrounds allowed. Such performances procured pleasure—young women laughed and joked with the photographer; they enjoyed each other's company and had fun. Once the performances were over each left not with one but with at least several printed photographs of herself, each at a relatively affordable price of 300–500 FCFA. If it was a group outing, photographs would be exchanged at the end. Drawing on the evocative name of the photographic studio Adelaide ventured to—"Fashion Photos: the best is still to come"— and the equally evocative genre, *photo de stars*, that Adelaide referred to when striking a *poster* reminiscent of Beyoncé, in this chapter I ask: how did photographic performances mobilise young women bodies? How did photographic performances, especially at the studio but also on other occasions that required one to dress one's best, allow young women to fashion themselves as stars? How did such performances relate to the studio slogan that "the best is still to come"?

The anthropological scholarship on photographic studios has analysed it from the perspective of identity, selfhood and personhood in context of modernity both in Africa (Buckley 2000, Behrend 2002, Mustafa 2002) and elsewhere (Pinney 1997, Strassler 2012, Morris 2008). Pinney examines studios in India as "chambers of dreams" (1997) where sitters dress up as their favourite movie stars and strike out-of-the-ordinary poses. Strassler (2012) shows how "modern" photographic backgrounds open up "landscapes of imagination" by picturing possibility as actuality and allow self-projection as Indonesian citizens (Strassler 2012). Buckley (2000) examines how in the Gambia the engagement with studio props such as phones, motorbikes or watches allows sitters to experiment with modernity. While I build on these studies by analysing similar aspects of photographic performance, such as dress, backgrounds and props, I also analyse an additional—and, for my informants, key—aspect, namely posing. In his pioneering study of Yoruba self-perception, Sprague (1979) has argued that through posing his interlocutors embody traditional values. Wendl builds on this approach, showing that posing is equally about "escape from tradition and social constraints" (2001:88). However,

following Jackson, I argue that "bodily actions cannot be reduced to semantic categories and are always opened to interpretation but in themselves they are not interpretations of anything i.e. transgressions or reinforcement of a certain semantic categories" (1989:134). If Sprague (1979) and Wendl (2001) look at posing in terms of the individual's relationship to society, the following discussion aims to analyse posing through the lens of the body and its use, asking what kind of bodily states are produced as young women move their bodies in and out of photographic performances.

Two other studies focus in particular on photographs' relationship to selfhood in Africa. Behrend (2002), in her discussion of photographs in Kenya, shows how a new subjectivity (arguably)—one that allows for self-awareness and self-appreciation in aesthetic terms—emerges among young men as they strike movie-like poses modelled on American hip-hop stars; and when they show these appearances in photographic albums to their peers. Similarly, Mustafa (2002) shows how in Dakar, Senegal, when women view each other's photographic albums, photographs extend female prestige and self-creation, which are already exploited in the sartorial practices known as *sansae*, as elegant and refined personae. Both studies note that photographs have a subversive potential: Mustafa shows how they are used in a strategy of distancing oneself from the poverty of everyday life, and Behrend (2002) describes them as providing alternatives to the ethnic and national discourses of the Kenyan state. If both studies bear similarities to how young Bamiléké women experience photographic performances—by highlighting how photographic self-fashioning allows for "ruptures" with the everyday—the following discussion instead draws out how photographic self-fashioning allows also for "continuities" with the everyday.

While these two studies show how photographs allow for alternative self-imaginations, Gilbert's analysis of mobile phone photography in Calabar, Nigeria, shows how young women use their "mobile identities" with effects in actual life (2019). However, all three studies imply an indexical relationship between the signifier and the signified in the photographic representation of the self, therefore alluding to notions of "photographic truth" and "modern self". Rather, as Pinney (1997) shows in the Indian case, the relationship between the signifier and signified in the photographic representation of the self has to be examined. Thus, the discussion below asks what the relationship is between self (or body) and its representation in photographic performances when, for example, young women dress and perform as stars.

While most of the analyses described above start from the notion of the self and draw out photography's effects on imagination, in what follows I propose to start from the body in order to ask what sensory effects photographic performances afford. In doing so, I argue young women's self-fashioning in and through photographic performances is constitutive of more than self-imagination and is part and parcel of "being-in-becoming" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), as young women "get ready for a chance" at social adulthood (cf. Behrend 2002, Buckley 2000, Strassler 2012, Gilbert 2019).

Where this thesis argues that through visual self-fashioning, which is valued as a set of skills, young women objectify and commodify their bodies, this chapter illustrates this point by focusing on how, through the skill of posing, young women learn to objectify their bodies for the camera lens. Furthering the argument that beauty work generates sensory effects, this chapter shows how, through photographic performances, young women generate a hope that the best is still to come.

The first section of this chapter situates photographic practices in relation to aesthetics, dress and fashion practices to explore the popular claim that "women love photographs" in Cameroon. The second section moves on to examine one aspect of photographic performances: posing (Mauss 1973 [1935]). I show how posing is a performative skill trained during photographic performances and which, when successful, generates attraction that can be transformed into other benefits. In the third section I show how photographic performances through transformations of time and space (Behrend et al 2015, Munn 1988, Gell 1992) conjure the actual and the possible, affording reverie (Bachelard 2010 [1960]). The final section takes the latter point further to draw out how repetition of photographic performances constitute a liminal ritual (Turner 1980), and how this ritualisation allows to re-inscribe the future in the present anew, generating hope—in affective form—that "the best is still to come" (cf. Miyzaki 2004).

"Women love photographs"

Valery, the photographer who made images of Adelaide in the vignette above, explained to me once: "Women love photographs here! They like beauty, they like *pleasures of the body*! *E-*

kie! Women! Each time a woman has a new dress, a new hairdo *she cannot resist*, she must film it, I tell you, each time! Maybe she comes to the studio, maybe she uses an Android phone. She wants to keep a souvenir of these things. Men do not do it, *e-kie*, they don't have time for it!" If women loved photographs, as Valery states, how does this gendered claim—which I heard repeatedly over the course of my fieldwork—come about?

In my fieldsite in Yaoundé, men and women alike perceived the consumption of photography, and when using android phones, its production, as a female domain.[66] The reasons that photographers like Valery and their clients cited for this gendered division repeatedly referred to adornment. Recall Adelaide's enunciation above: "I have not filmed this dress yet"—it was the dress that had not been "filmed". This phrase alludes to a particular "entangled relation" (cf. Wendl 2001) between dresses and photographs, a relation that, in West Africa, has been predominantly noted in the literature in terms of memory and identity, where photographers and clients alike often cite "immortalising the clothes" as a reason for taking a photograph (Wendl 2001, Pinther and Ng 2007, Buckely 2001). Thus, in this context, clothes index and materialise particular relationships. While this is also the case for Cameroon I would like to pinpoint another dimension of these entangled relationships, namely, as Valery said: "photographs and dress are ways to beautify (*embellir*) people" (cf. Buckely 2001). The way that photographs "beautify", Valery further explained, is similar to dress: "Dress beautifies people like colour on the photographs does; to beautify is to valorise, a photograph or a dress valorises a person … but if a woman wears a dress and holds a flower on the photograph it does not render her beautiful, it only beautifies her photograph." Valery concluded, shedding light on how dress and photographs relate to bodies, that is, as crafted surfaces.

As Valery's narrative draws out, and as the earlier chapters of this thesis have explored, appearance is recognised and appreciated as a crafted surface and a skill for crafting surfaces (cf. Miller 1995, cf. Buckley 2001, Buckley 2014). A photograph depicts the surface of the body, a canvas that lends itself, like dress, to playing with a "variety of styles" and engaging different skills. The very name of the studio Adelaide went to, "Fashion Photos", shows that, like dress, photographs are objects that can and should be fashionable; that there are different photographic styles, as there are styles of dress; and that both are ephemeral and subject to change. Note that the photograph is here treated as an object that beautifies people's bodies:

66. This is not to say that men did not get photographs made, for of course they did. What the section attempts to do is to account for this gendered claim, that "women love photographs here".

rather than being "looked through" to say that a woman looks beautiful, it is recognised that the photograph *makes you look* in a certain way. Objects are assigned an aesthetic value which is related to the surface of the body and is differentiated from morality conversely to what the state discourses described in the previous chapter implied (chapter 2). Beautifying is an effect created on the body through an arrangement of dress, pose, colour, sheen and props which mediate bodies and make them look a certain way, echoing what Benjamin calls the "display value of commodities" (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991, cf. Strassler 2012, chapter 3). Thus, for instance, Bene recounted to me how she had photographed herself wearing hats made from wax print cloth at a store which she could not afford to buy from, and which spoke of wealth. When she showed the photos to her new colleagues at a small accounting office, they knew she did not come from a wealthy home—otherwise she would not have taken that job but ended up in a bank or state administration—but valued her skill of crafting an attractive appearance, and accordingly treated her well during her training period.

If celebrating clothes and coming to studios to "photograph clothes" (*filmer les habilles*) was and is considered a female practice, this was, in part, rooted in longstanding ideas about the economies of households in particular, and intimate economies in general (chapter 1). Among Bamiléké, women were (and are) gifted clothes and textiles, among other items, for their labour in the fields and in recognition of their reproductive capacity (Goheen 1996, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999). Textiles, dresses and especially *pagne* were and are an important part of bridewealth. Girlfriends and their kin expected their boyfriends to pay for their dress and judged the seriousness of a man's interest by the quality and quantity of the *pagne* gifted (chapter 1). In that sense dress was and is women's "wealth in things" and stands in for their "wealth in men" (Guyer and Belinga 1995, chapter 2).

But the popular perception that "women love photography" seemed to gain particular traction with the increasing importance of newness and access to fashion in the context of trade liberalisation and media pluralisation in Cameroon in the 2000s, both of which were inscribed in the longer trajectory of reforms following the end of Cold War (Konings 2011, Piot 2010). Local and global media became saturated with feminine figures preoccupied with beauty. This was illustrated in various shows, movie series and telenovelas—of the latter, a favourite of the young women at the time of my fieldwork was the Mexican show *Triomphe d'amour*. These feminine figures circulating in the media positioned the female body—beautified and seductive—as a central means of bringing about the lives and social adulthood young women

desired (Tonda 2005). If these manifestations partly echo Comaroff's arguments about millennial capitalism (2000) young women considered the production of such appearances not as "success without effort" (ibid.) but conversely, as requiring, entailing and bespeaking skills and work. As such young women's actions resonated with Illouz's arguments on aesthetic capitalism which consists in production of emotions and feelings through objects, experiences, styles and looks (2017; see introduction). Many young women tried to imitate the figures they saw in the media by, for example, persistently observing them and analysing details of their poses and styles, and seeing their success in general and its material manifestations in particular in terms of achievement. Affordable Chinese-import beauty products that have flooded the local markets since the turn of millennium allowed this imitation to happen in the first place. This further fuelled young women's investments in photography: they photographed themselves, as Valery said, each time they had something new—a new garment, or a new style of assembling garments.

But young women acknowledged that fashion is fleeting but, more importantly, that it requires work and resources. One had, for example, to know how to navigate social networks to obtain the desired textiles, to have the money to pay the seamstress. Moreover, one had to have fashion competence, follow fashions online and monitor one's friends-competitors, take the time to design a fashionable dress and market it as unique so that it was copied (chapter 3). In that sense being able to, as young women put it, "be fashion", was a skill and a competence, reflecting an achievement for women whose alluring styles were recognised as reflecting their taste and manifesting their industriousness (Warnier 1993). Photographing this achievement not only enabled them to circulate and share their fashions further and become a fashionista (chapter 3) but, equally, reiterated feelings of pride, contemporaneity and success even once the dress was no longer in fashion, or in the instances of being claimed by someone (*arracher*) or given away, as it was still prominently displayed on the wall and/or on the phone.

There is a colonial imprint on this gendered division, of women as consumers and men as producers of photographs, which fed the claim that "women love photographs". With the introduction of photography as a tool of the state's panopticon, men were drawn to work as photographers in the documentation and archives sections of the colonial and postcolonial state (Schneider 2018). Another possible reason, as mentioned above, for the male domination of photographic production relates to figurative representation being a male domain of power (Mbembe 2001): in patriarchal Bamiléké chiefdoms, men were smiths, carvers and mask-

makers. Today, while men continued to dominate the photographic profession, women produced photographic self-representations using android phones. However, young women and their kin agreed, being photographed at a studio or by a professional photographer remained the best option if money allowed (it cost 300–500 FCFA per print). This indicates that the photographic profession was still highly regarded because of the photographer's skill and expertise (Guyer 1993), and a printed photograph was valorised not only as a representation but as a crafted object. Thus, men continue to dominate professional photographic production which today increasingly centres on female bodies.

Thus, the gendering of photographic practices emerged from a convergence of the political economic conditions and cultural notions of personhood around the turn of the millennium when the conjuncture of trade and media liberalisation reinforced perceptions of women as consumers and men as producers of professional photographic practice. Women loved photographs because, as Mustafa notes, photographs prolonged, multiplied and reproduced what dress already allowed for (2002): a manifestation and accumulation of their wealth in things, standing in for their wealth in people and wealth in knowledge (Guyer and Belinga 1995). This is not to say that the photographs did not objectify female bodies for the male gaze, but if women loved photographs it was because of the particular ways that photographs, like dress, valorised their bodies, allowing them to display themselves in terms of their skills (Guyer 1993) and manifest industriousness (Warnier 2007). Yet if photographs could manifest skills, photographic performances required learning and training in one particular skill, namely the skill of posing; a skill learned under the auspices of male photographers and which was used by young women in the studio, but also in their own self-created selfies taken with android phones.

Posing

Recall the words Adelaide used when posing at the photographic studio. The Cameroonian French expression used for posing, particularly by youth, is *faire un poster,* which literally translates as "to do a *poster*". Rather than an "uncomfortable imitation" (Barthes 2000 [1981]), *faire un poster* highlights the active effort on the part of sitter that self-fashioning in front of the camera lens entails. *Faire* encompasses a particular form of imaginative and corporeal

labour while *poster* speaks to the association with the public realm. That is, rather than being a process of objectification in which a sitter experiences self-estrangement (cf. Barthes 2000 [1981]), *faire un poster* is an active process of self-fashioning wherein young women engaged in what Enwenzor calls "deliberate performance of the self" (2011, cf. Berger 1994).

Furthermore, "to photograph" was referred to as *se filmer*—literally, to film—which reflects not only the association of photography with cinema and movies in terms of the *posters* fashioned, but crucially relates photography's temporality to mobility and movement, re-defining it in opposition to Barthes' conceptualisation of immobility, freezing and death (1981). Recall that Adelaide spent considerable time in the studio and performed several poses; the whole performance resembled a modelling or catwalk session.[67] Of course, photographers and their clients recognised that a photograph is a still object. However, semiotic analysis allows us to examine the ambiguity and paradox within the photographic process from an emic perspective as an "elaborate constitutive process of the self" (Enwezor 2010). If a pose could be any way in which one posed, a *poster* would refer specifically to poses modelled on popular culture. However, the fact that pose and *poster* were used interchangeably at times does not, I suggest, speak of confusion, but of indeterminacy between the appearance and identity that made posing as a bodily practice, a skill of crafting surfaces, drawing out space for creativity and play as integral to beauty work.

The idea that *faire un poster* implies an embodied imagination and a bodily skill echoes what Marcel Mauss famously called "techniques of the body" (1973 [1935]). For Mauss, such corporeal techniques are informed by specific societal rules and habits learned through pedagogy and imitation, implying both the institutional or traditional passing on of gendered bodily attitudes and the unconscious appropriation of ways of moving and being (1973 [1935]). This definition is particularly helpful in framing *faire un poster* as Mauss locates bodily habits in interactions and in relation to an environment of objects and others (1973 [1935], Warnier 2007). Furthermore, Mauss draws attention to corporeal learning as an active process—both conscious and unconscious—and highlights its association with social values, norms and goals (ibid). This notion bridges the imaginary—conjured aesthetically—and grounds it in the body. Thus, *posters* were felt to be mechanical and non-intentional in nature. If in urban contexts,

67. Here Adelaide was alone, however, the individualising aspect of photography was often subverted in collective outings to the studio and in different photographic compositions—alone or in a group—and in the subsequent exchange of photographs. Thus, the relationships of the self were depicted and maintained, and relational personhood revealed.

dressed bodies were constantly shaped into perfection, in Yaoundé shaping bodies into perfection through dress and *poster* was especially significant for young women (Sylvanus 2016, Newell 2012, de Boeck 2012, Mustafa 2002). Where Sylvanus notes that Togolese urban women wearing *pagne* evaluate not the style per se but "how body moves a style" (2016:34), in Yaoundé what was learnt and evaluated in front of the camera was not only how the body "wears" a dress, but also how it "wears" a *poster*. In short, *faire un poster* is both performative capacity and embodied skill (Ferguson 1999).

Young girls and boys were socialised into posing from an early age. Children were actually those in the household who most often wanted to view albums; adults claimed to be busy with more important tasks. As I flipped through numerous albums, I was often accompanied by the youngest members of the extended family who judged the *posters* of those in the photographs. Once we had gone through the whole album, children would playfully enact the poses they had seen, drawing into their playful performances items such as glasses and mobile phones, even without a camera to pose for. It was a form of play, of having fun, but also a practice through which children trained their bodies and learnt the *posters* of the past. When I accompanied photographers to various events I saw how each of them had to go to considerable lengths to get rid of children from the shoot. Children appeared in front of the camera as soon as they spotted it and enacted *posters* and longer sequences that they had seen, for example, in popular music videos on android phones as their older cousins browsed YouTube for music by their favourite stars. In this way, young children started training their bodies into the techniques of the pose, acquired skills of doing *posters*, learned new and old *posters* alike. This performative capacity consisted in what Benjamin called a "capacity for inventive reception based on mimetic improvisation" (1992 [1936], cf. Taussig 1992).

Consider the example of Vicky, Adelaide's seamstress, who lived with her two children in a small parcel which was at once her home and a sewing shop shared with two apprentices. Once she was invited to accompany relatives to a Cameroonian music award ceremony hosted by the private TV channel Canal 2. She saw it as an exceptional occasion and decided to go. The ceremony was taking place at the Hilton Hotel. Not only would this be the first time Vicky would enter the premises of the most extravagant and cosmopolitan hotel in Yaoundé, she knew it would be a well-attended event and desired to be noticed. Recounting the ceremony in detail at the sewing shop later, Vicky underlined her satisfaction with the public recognition she had achieved through dress and *poster* during the prize ceremony. "You know who Laurence

[Adelaide's wealthy sister] is, don't you? I did a Michelle Obama *poster*, do you see which one? She sees me and says: you are imitating well! Meanwhile others have been looking at me too. *Un gars* passing by sees me and exclaims: 'president's wife!'" Vicky seemed particularly gratified that she was recognised at the event in a way she desired to be seen. When Laurence later commissioned a number of dresses from her shop and brought along two of her friends, Vicky attributed it to the performance she had staged at the awards. Thus, for young women apt in the technique of the pose, doing a *poster* was a matter of skill and pride and, like dress, could elicit appreciation from others, creating "openings" for upward social mobility. Indeed, Vicky practiced the turtle walk, in particular, for weeks in her sewing shop, prior to the ceremony. Thus, doing a *poster* was part of beauty work and worked as a technology of enchantment (chapter 2).

But if striking *posters* could enhance one's presence and visibility, an inappropriate *poster*, or failing to do one at all, could elicit shame. It could meet with an unpleasant remark from the photographer, kin or friends, or from onlookers, and could even bring ridicule. Stella, an unmarried woman in her early 30s, who had already posed several times in different clothes in her neighbour's garden, at some point felt her technique of the pose was exhausted. She stood still in front of camera, and just as the photographer was about to take another shot, her younger sister, Manuela appeared. "What kind of a *poster* is this?" Manuela mocked her sister for staging a pose inappropriate for the garden setting and for the office dress she was wearing. Standing expressionless and still in front of the camera was a *mater poster*, what young people called the poses in the black-and-white photographs of their mothers and grandmothers. It could be staged by young women but had to be performed dressed in *kaba* or another voluminous garment. "I don't care! I have more *posters* than you!" Stella dismissed her younger sister, hinting at one way in which female competition takes place (chapter 5). "What does your *poster* even express?" Manuela continued mocking her sister echoing advertising slogans of beauty products that encourage expressiveness through appearance but also revealed, as the next chapter will show, beauty work as emotional work. "My *posters* are better than yours!" Manuela added and disappeared behind the white lace curtain at the entrance to Stella's house. This interruption of the performance reveals how *posters* could also be a matter of "competition for attention" (Fuh 2009) between young women, straining their relationships.

There were, of course, different ways in which the body should pose depending on the context and how one desired to be seen (figure 27). *Posters de stars* were modelled on famous women,

from music stars such as Charlotte Dipanda or Beyoncé, to political figures such as First Ladies Chantal Biya (of Cameroon) or Michelle Obama (of the United States). These involved wearing a *sexy mais responsable* dress but also other dresses such as the long, tight gowns often seen on celebrities attending European film or Cameroonian music award ceremonies, and walking in similar ways to them, slowly displaying the dress from each side. Young women could stand facing forwards or at an angle, with one or both hands resting on a thigh, and as they walked they might try to move their buttocks like Beyoncé. Another variation involved a similar arrangement of the hands but with one's back facing towards the camera so as to display the dress design. What was key was displaying dresses and other apparel well, often posing against a uniform background, to make the dress style come better out (*ressortir*). Their accessories—bags, shoes, hairstyles—characterised sheen (chapter 1) that was meant to hit the viewer's eye (*frapper*). Through voluminous and shiny dress and *posters*, young women occupied more physical space, thus enhancing their presence through allure and glamour (cf. Bayart 1989)

Other *posters* were modelled on old photographs of young women's mothers and grandmothers, the so-called *mater poster* that Manuela mocked her sister Stella for doing in an inappropriate context (figure 28). These were often seated individual poses, group photos, for example two women shaking hands (like co-wives), or else a squatting pose, which was modelled on pin-up girls, and expressed submissiveness within hierarchical Bamiléké chiefdoms. Young women struck such *posters* at chiefdom ceremonies and in other contexts, depending on how they desired to be seen. But if young women performed *mater posters,* even *posters de star* were not their exclusive domain. Married women and even *grand-mères* also engaged in such poses, often instructed by their daughters.

Posters could be evaluated in terms of how they fitted with the performer's status, age and gender yet, as one studio advertisement put it, they were "not reserved for certain 'categories of persons'". On the one hand photographers like Valery could highlight the differences, for example, in gender and age. "Women do too much of *manières* when they are being filmed, the hands on the waist, on the knees, they touch their hair etc, while men film themselves crossed legs and standing with hands in their pockets," he said, but hastened to add: "Everyone does a *poster* today. I even filmed someone of 70 years who did a *poster* like those youth does today—he said that when he will die it will be enlarged for his funeral. Youth have their *posters*, elders have their *posters*, but it does not prohibit anyone to do anything [*tout confondu*]."



Figure 27. Examples of posters at the studio or in the garden acting as a studio. Clockwise from upper left: Marilyn Monroe *poster*, *poster de star*, *mater poster*, squatting pose. Photo credits: Marilyn Monroe poster used with the permission of the photographer (2018); all others Ewa Majczak (2016)



Figure 28. A squatting pose (left) and *mater poster* (right) performed by young women's mothers. Photo credit: Jacques Toussele (left); and used with permission from a personal album of an interlocutor (right) (c.1970)

Thus, as Adelaide instructed me, echoing her word described in chapter 3, you take *posters* depending on "where you go, where you stand and what you wear, or how you feel". As Valery concluded: "Everyone can dress up as they way [*chacun peut se déguiser comme il veut*]." Thus, if *posters* as bodily poses can signify a certain gender and rank (Ferme 2001, Jackson 1989), such signification can be and is "transgressed" in practice, drawing out the playfulness and creativity that creating *posters* as a matter of crafted surface involved. Indeed often young women said "I take *posters* from my head", evading precision in naming them, and instead revealing *posters* as embodied knowledge enacted through improvisation.

It is here that we might reflect on the political dimension of these bodily techniques. Indeed as Warnier's elaboration of Mauss's (1973 [1935]) and Foucault's (1988) ideas suggests, these techniques are also technologies of power (2007). Being able to engage in a series of movements as if one was on the red carpet in Cannes involved learning how to attractively display their bodies. As such young women embodied display value of commodities (cf Benjamin 1992 [1939]). In doing so, they reiterated wider patriarchal and (post)colonial

regimes of commodity capitalism and nation-state that (visually) commodify female bodies as objects of exchange (Tonda 2005, Felski 1996, Butler 1990). But there was also a sense in which a *poster* was read as skill precisely because it was a technique of the body, a social skill that involves learning through the practice of different *posters* and striking them to influence the way one is seen, that one could excel at and thus manifest industriousness. As such, *posters* could be read as an embodiment of an achievement not reducible to wider ocular regimes that they unsettled as much as produced (Butler 1990, 1993).

For young women the photographic studio provided a space that was specifically consecrated to the learning and practice of *posters*. Indeed, while some young women confided in me, with shame, their ineptitude at *posters*, this could be remediated at the studio where a professional photographer, usually a man, instructed them on, for example, how far to extend the leg, or where exactly to place a hand for a *poster de star*. Such help in improving one's bodily skills could be also be given by friends or kin; indeed, studio excursions were at times collective enterprises wherein those who knew many *posters* advised their companions precisely which *poster* to take and how. A schoolfriend or a cousin could also act as a "master teacher", however, this implied for a young woman a risk of being laughed at by a person one knew well, and by extension possibility of having reputation challenged. Therefore, an outing to the studio alone, with instruction by an expert—male—photographer, was the preferred option for those who felt they lacked *poster* skills. To be sure this also allowed for concealment from others. The technique of posing was a performative skill that, like acting, entailed an apprenticeship to learn *posters*. Studios afforded a time and space where, under the eye of the master photographer, one could learn how to pose where, in which dress and when. It is to this studio time and space that I now turn.

On reverie

Adelaide, whom we met in the opening vignette, had a good quality android phone and told me that these days (in 2016) young women like her went to photographic studios less often than in the past, before android phones became widely available around 2010. Larissa, her friend, who was an avid android phone user and selfie taker, still went to the studio during the festive period at the end of the year. She said she did not have time or money to go more often these days as she was struggling to make ends meet. Maybe wealthier women who had free time could go

and get themselves photographed as she used to when she was in high school. She laughed: "When I will have money, I will go to studios everyday!" Her phone was filled with photographs of herself, including digital images of the printed photographs she had had taken at the studio. Given the widespread availability of mobile phones and the new possibilities of making self-images these afforded, as well as the economic insecurity of the *filles androides* I worked with, we might well ask why studios remained so popular.

This is not to say that young women did not use the cameras of their android phones to make images and photograph themselves, for they did. However, they found phone cameras, and the selfies these produced, somewhat unsatisfactory. This was because, as Larissa explained, at such a close distance "the most important details of the dress are omitted, therefore you cut the head, to show your shoes, dress and its styles … not everything can fit". Therefore, as the previous chapter shows, young women used phone cameras to photograph their dresses—their dressed bodies, without the head, to highlight the creative and unique aspects of a garment—and to circulate their styles (chapter 3, chapter 5). When they wanted a photograph taken of themselves in full with their phone, they had to resort to asking someone else so that the full dress and the head would appear in the photograph or, alternatively, take a selfie with their phone in extended upwards to take a photograph of themselves and their dresses from above, ensuring that the garment was prominently displayed (figure 29). Often, they would simply photograph an image taken at a studio, or have an electronic copy directly transferred to their phone at an extra charge of 500 FCFA. On the whole, young women agreed that it was best to have a professional photograph of the self—the entire body—in a dress at the studio, for it allowed for the widest canvas on which to display one's wealth.

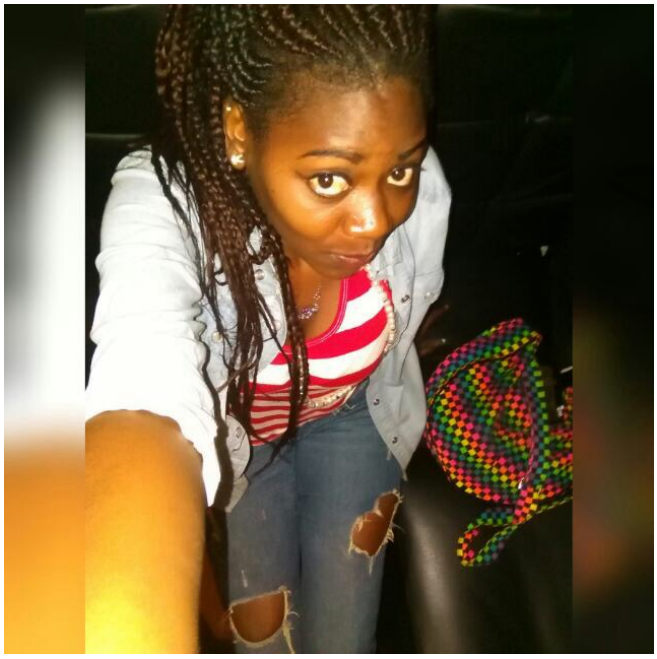


Figure 29. The right way to take a selfie is to include most of one's garments by, for example, taking a photograph from above to include the holes in the jeans and a bag at the side, but excluding the shoes that the photographer wanted to hide. If the shoes are meant to be shown in this kind of photograph, the feet are placed on the thigh. Usually camera is held above to include as much as possible of the dress style and accessories—one's wealth in things, standing in for wealth in people. Sometimes, this is at the cost of showing the own face (depending if one's make-up is worth displaying) as was the case of images of sexy styles (figure 11) where face was hidden. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2018)

Cameroon's first photographic studios were probably established c. 1897 by the Lutterhold family in the coastal city of Douala (Haney 2010, Zeitlyn 2019). Many of the earliest local photographers learnt their art there or in Calabar in neighbouring Nigeria. These studios were equipped with props, e.g. with dresses and later radio sets and wired telephones that a sitter could borrow, affording those who visited them on rare occasions to appear at their best and valorise their everyday appearances. If clients came "at their best" they could accessorise themselves and experiment with different props and as such compensate for what they did not have, while reinvigorating their own desires. Jacques Toussele, one of the first photographers in the town of Mbouda (covering the Grassfields villages of Babajou, Bamissengue and Batcham), learnt his trade from a Nigerian photographer in Bamenda on the Calabar trade route, and improved it during trips for materials and knowledge to Douala. He started his practice in 1960 and, in my interviews with him, recalled how clients appeared in front of his lens to show off their garments but also how they borrowed props from him and from others; indeed, he himself literally served as a prop (Zeitlyn 2010a, 2010b). While displaying personal

possessions mainly in the form of a dress speaks of photographs as records, the borrowing indicates the playful and imaginative quality of these photographs. I suggest that the ways in which photographic performances afforded to conjoin the actual and the imagined, and ground it in the body—affording reverie (Bachelard 2010 [1960])—accounts for the popularity of studios in Yaoundé even today.[68]

Yaoundé's photography studioscape is today punctuated by numerous studios along main roads and inside the *quartiers*, which are complemented by makeshift studios put up and dismantled overnight during festive seasons.[69] During this time studios in particular are refurbished and redecorated, and clients often come in for photographs wearing clothes they have received as gifts. Clothes, together with backgrounds and props, play an important role in how clients and photographers create a representation in the studio that diverges from seeking to portray the essence of the "real" person wherein such items are considered merely superficial (cf. Pinney 1997, Strassler 2010, Buckely 2001, Behrend 2002). Conversely, dress, posing, props, backgrounds and carefully staged performances put studios in a realm closer to the theatre stage. Dress here is closer to the Western understanding of costume, pointing to how appearance is evaluated in terms of crafted surface rather than indexical of the self. Rather than a window into reality, studio spaces operate as a space and time for the *projection of the possible*, that is, in "world creating" rather than "world duplicating" mode (Strassler 2010 cf. Vokes 2012) wherein the way that one displays oneself speaks of one's skills and embodied knowledge.

When Jacques Toussele opened his first photographic studio around 1962, he remembered that props representing both tradition and modernity, as experienced in the Cameroon Grassfields, were used: for example, a drinking horn and a plastic flower, a Greek column and a Royal Palace carving. One of Jacques' clients, then a child, recalled with excitement: "It was Sunday and we have waited the entire week to go to the studio. My mother took an appointment earlier at Jacques. We put on our own clothes. My mother, my father, my two brothers and I. We had group photographs, and even individual ones, I had one, this was something! My father and

68. As this chapter shows, studios were certainly very popular amongst the young woman from the Bamiléké ethnic group amongst whom I conducted my fieldwork, however I was unable to determine if studios hold particular importance for them compared to other ethnic groups of Cameroon.
69. Most of the studio photographers operating around independence were said to have learnt their profession in Douala or in Calabar, Nigeria. Many in the past, as today, are Bamiléké or from the wider Grassfields, and buy their studio materials (lamps, printing machines, backgrounds, computers, software) through their networks extending to Nigeria, the United States and China. Others studio owners and photographers in Yaoundé are from Nigeria.

mother photographed themselves alone and together, with *grille* [signifying modern multi-story buildings] and against backgrounds with the Lion *as if* in the *chefferie*!" As such, a sitter who engaged in different poses at Jacques' studio produced "vernacular modernities" (Bhabha 1994). Jacques acted as a cultural broker of modern symbols circulated in *romans photo* and adapted them to local meanings—such as the Greek column, which he thought resembled those in the chief's palace, but had a new, "modern" and Western appearance. But as he added, it was ultimately the client who decided which dress to wear and pose to strike, which prop to match.

Then, as now, different occasions warranted a trip to the studio, provided that one was well groomed. Jacques remembered that his first photographic assignments were often on market days, when people would be photographed for their national identity cards. On those visits people also wanted "photographs of pleasure" (*photos de plaisir*), wearing their best dresses which they ostentatiously displayed as they engaged in "arts of parading" at the market (chapter 1) with photography serving to enhance or extend the importance of bodily display. With independence, the practice of commemorating events through dress and photography was harnessed to celebrate the new nation-state: National Day, Reunification Day or Labour Day, for which specially designed *pagnes* were sold. The end of the year was an important photographic occasion and remains today the busiest period for photographers and printing labs across Cameroon: men and women photographed themselves individually and in groups, with friends, families and kin in view of receiving both individual and group portraits. Other photographic occasions were introduced later: Youth Day, Teacher's Day, and today, most importantly, Women's Day. These were also occasions for people to travel across the country to visit relatives and a common practice at the end of such visit, then, as now, was to go to the studio and exchange photographs. Photography accompanied life events such as marriages (often church weddings) and funerals. Today these occasions are extended to include baptisms, birthday parties and both the "traditional" and civil parts of a wedding. Importantly for young women these are occasions for which parents are inclined to share theirs or purchase *pagne,* or at least a part of it, allowing them to have another new fashionable dress stitched, and consequently a photograph made to "remember clothes".

Back in the day, even if everyone had to have an ID photograph taken, Jacques' clients largely belonged to socially privileged groups: families of wealth and/or rank, who could afford garments and other types of decoration, and extend their display through photographs. The

older women I met who did not have photographs of their garments from the past often explained this in terms of lacking the economic means and/or social relations who would have paid for or offered dresses for photography. This is also why quantity mattered. Today in Yaoundé, photography continued to be a matter of social wealth (cf. Bourdieu 1990). I asked Adelaide why she went to Fashion Photos rather than another studio closer to her home. "I cannot just go to the studio in my area, these studios are not good enough. You have been to Fashion Photos—it shines! It is clean and there is air-conditioning inside. Laurence[70] would not even go out but call a photographer home, she has the means!" If Laurence could invite a photographer home that meant she not only had the financial resources but also a house interior to display instead of a studio background. This also implied she had a husband and children, in addition to the many dresses bought, gifted or offered, standing for many social relations she had and the many events she was invited to. Indeed, this social wealth was manifested in quantity—not only through the numerous photographs hanging on Laurence's salon walls, but through the five albums she owned and prominently displayed to guests. In the same vein, if Adelaide could travel to another *quartier* with her many dresses, this also represented her social and economic relations, through the money for the taxi and for the many photo prints but also dresses and time off. Also, as Adelaide made clear, different studios spoke of the status or reputation of a *quartier* in Yaoundé. The stamp on the back or front of the print revealed where the photograph was taken together with its location, revealing the standing of the studio, or its class. Adelaide had a rare opportunity to have her sessions at the prestigious Fashion Photos across town, for which she saved up money, but many young women more often just visited a studio located nearby. If some young women could have a befriended photographer come home, and photograph themselves in a neighbour's garden, this was similar to having a luxurious salon and a professional photographer come insofar as it represented social wealth (i.e. using the neighbours' garden signalled good social relations with them as did the fact that a friend could travel across the town to your place in order to *film* you).

For Adelaide's sister Laurence there was no need to pose against a background because she could sit in her luxurious salon and call in a photographer. But for young women going to the studio for *photos de plaisir* and choosing backgrounds, dresses and poses was an exciting, pleasurable and entertaining experience (*pour se distrare*).[71] Recall Adelaide's photographic session. She posed in a sexy dress, against a popular background with a villa. She thought this

70. Adelaide's wealthy married sister, the mother of four children, mentioned above.
71. Photographers usually differentiated two main genres: *photo de plaisir* (of which *photo de star* was a subgenre) and ID photos.

was the house she wished to own in the future. Then she posed against a desert background in "traditional" clothes and said: "as if I have travelled to Nigeria". The studio space, not unlike the cinema or theatre stage, juxtaposed incompatible spaces in the single space of a room.[72] There was a here and now, visible in the physical continuity of the built environment of the studio and the "elsewhere" depicted by two-dimensional backgrounds. Popular backgrounds during my fieldwork included mountain houses, beaches and waterfalls standing in for holiday destinations but also for Grassfields. They also included Dubai skyscrapers standing in for migration destinations, the interiors of luxurious homes representing desirable domestic spaces and exteriors of American villas with a sports car parked in the driveway. Backgrounds also spoke of national modernity through urban space: parks, roundabouts, modern hotels, multi-story buildings and swimming pools. Whereas the specific image might have changed—in the 1980s the Eiffel tower was popular, not Dubai skyscrapers—the themes of the backgrounds, here related to migration, remained similar (Piot 2010).

Plain backgrounds were also popular, especially to accentuate the contours of a dress *(ressortir)* as in *photos de star*. "Elsewhere" was conjured as a space of cinema, celebrity and fame evoked through the flashes of Hollywood-like bulbs, which called upon Valery's imagination and let him conjure into existence a red carpet that elicited Adelaide's response of waving to an imaginary audience. In representing "elsewhere", backgrounds erased the distance from what they portrayed. "Going to the studio could feel like travel beyond the horizon of here and now" (Strassler 2012), standing for and materialising young women's desires, even if commemorating a local event when a young woman might come to have her dress photographed: Women's Day, a wedding or a funeral.

72. The studio then could be framed as a heterotopia (Foucault 1986), a space set apart which allows for a temporal suspension of normative meanings and therefore allows for coexistence of what otherwise would be ambiguous or paradoxical. The juxtaposition in a single space of the studio of several (in)compatible spaces echoes Foucault's notion of heterotopia. In his lecture Of other spaces (....) he elaborates the concept first mentioned in the preface to *Order of Things* (....). Foucault writes: "There are also probably in every culture, in every civilisation, real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (1986:24). He also details the categories of heterotopia: crisis heterotopias, where individuals are in a crisis state in relation to the reality in which they live, for example, adolescents at a boarding school; heterotopias of deviation when individuals deviate from the norm, e.g. in prison. A cemetery is a heterotopia in Foucault's understanding, as it is connected with all other sites of the village or city, since all individuals have relatives buried; cinemas and theatres, which are important for this discussion, are also heterotopia for they juxtapose in a single space incompatible spaces: two-dimensional screens and three-dimensional moving images. Heterotopia are characterised by heterochronies; that is, they are linked to slices in time, and can indefinitely accumulate time as libraries and museums do through archives, or suspend it like vacation villages and festivals. Heterotopias presuppose a system of opening and closing and require certain corporeal gestures, as occurs in a hammam or sauna. Their role is to create a space of illusion or compensation by an appeal to imagination. Importantly, as deBoeck points out the appeal to imagination is conjured up through the aesthetic (2004:255), which was key to young women's performances in the studios. The important difference between mine and de Boeck's take on heterotopia is that I see it as enabling both rupture and continuity.

Larissa staged her photographic performances in her neighbour's garden with her male photographer friend using the camera of my android phone. The garden had white walls, but the photographer added backgrounds when editing the photographs. She brought three garments, each indexing a relationship or event: two body-hugging second-hand dresses (*friperie*) and one *pagne* in *sexy mais responsable* style (chapter 2). She posed first in a tight dress made from a solid-coloured fabric, for which the photographer suggested she choose a blue background, and the pose she struck was one of a *photo de star*. Then, dressed in a *pagne* dress, she chose a background with a bush, and adopted a squatting *mater poster* in front of it. The final pose she struck in yet another garment was outside, in front of the gate-door, in a body-hugging dress. In her performance, Larissa aimed to match the type of dress she wore to the background. The dress in *pagne* which represented "modernity" through its cut, and "tradition" through its classic *pagne* print, found its appropriate environment against the bush which spoke both of modern spaces such as parks and a green roundabout (a favourite spot for marriage photography in Yaoundé), but also of tradition in relation to the forests of her village and chiefdom area. She posed in a squat, which retreated from images of pin-up girls in magazines towards an expression of the submissiveness that young women and men must display in the hierarchical structures of the chiefdom (fig. 22 and 23). Then she posed in a body-hugging dress, mirroring the depictions of celebrities in the global media at awards ceremonies.

Larissa's photographic performances contrasted with her experiences in the everyday. For her as for other young women I worked with, studio visits were a break from everyday time, even if fleetingly: the latter was punctuated by, for example, by going to the market, cooking, cleaning, caring for younger siblings or the elderly, attending school and doing homework. Young women were often called on for kin-related obligations—being sent to the market to sell for an aunt who had to leave town for a funeral, helping a junior with homework, delivering money to the association and so on. They might be disciplined in more mundane tasks like an appearance by family and other institutions such as church or school which imposed certain dress and hair codes on them even if young women found creative ways to subvert them. In the studio, time was contested or even inverted: young women were free of these constraints. Instead they engaged or submitted to other constraints, in particular those of commodity consumption: it was time punctuated by their desires and pleasures, it was a time of play and enjoyment, echoing the prime products of aesthetic capitalism (Illouz 2017). They dressed, moved and posed as they wanted, in ways that, perhaps, they would refrain from in other

circumstances because of the risk of losing respectability (chapter 2). They laughed and joked and indulged in bodily pleasures involving the techniques of the pose and cherished the edited backgrounds that placed them elsewhere.

Young women chose how they wanted to dress and what they wanted to enact and as such their playful performance was not restricted by the desires of others to conform in their everyday lives to gerontocratic, hierarchical and patriarchal structures, gender norms and social stratification. Thus, and similarly to Behrend (2002) and Mustafa's observations (2002), we see that the categories upon which this self-fashioning in front of camera lens was built transcended dominant ethnic and national discourses of belonging (cf. Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000, Geschiere and Jackson 2006) and normative social roles, as young women re-defined perceptual boundaries (cf. Gondola 1999). In doing so they drew on a neoliberal regime of commodity consumption that objectified their bodies for display and male gaze, forming "structures of feeling" (Williams 1977) as aesthetic subjectivities. The search for fashionability and respectability that beauty work encompassed, while affording corporeal innovations, was not a form of protest or rebellion as has been argued for Congolese *sapeurs* (Gondola 1999) or male youth in Bamenda (Fuh 2009). Studio performance, when put against young women's everyday, was a space of compensation, given the various forms of stigmatisation and the predicaments they experienced related to the social and ethnic category to which they belonged (see introduction).

Larissa fashioned herself in the photography performance in the garden which acted as her studio. Rather than depicting herself performing mundane and everyday tasks, she fashioned herself in terms of beauty and wealth through the styles she wore, the poses she took and the backgrounds she chose. Her backgrounds in particular spoke of her aspirations and desires: uniform colours typical of the photographs of stars, interiors of planes standing in for her desire to travel and be mobile, a luxurious house for the spaces where she wished she could live. In the photographic performance she was both Larissa the social junior but also Larissa the star. As such, she belonged to the global "sartorial ecumene" (cf. Mustafa 2002): she was neither imitating nor emulating stars, but was a star herself (cf. Gondola 1999, Friedman 1994). By photographing herself as both a Bamiléké social junior and a Yaoundé urbanite— as she said herself, "as if"—she brought what *is* and the *not yet* together.

In order to engage in studio acting, young women had to suspend normative meanings and judgements related to the differences between the self as a star and the self as Bamiléké social junior and engage in "as if": a particular dream-like state or enchantment or reverie (Bachelard 2010 [1960]). When young women posed in all these different ways—as stars, presidents' wives, married woman and models—they engaged a particular bodily attitude concomitant with anticipatory actions— actions that re-inscribe in the present an orientation to the future (Miyazaki 2006)—bodily cultivating the performative capacity of "as if". In this way the possibilities of "not yet" appeared uncannily close at hand, affording a reverie (Bachelard 1960): a conscious creative daydream about hypothetical lives and futures (cf. Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991, cf. Tonda 2005, cf. Berlant 2011, cf. Archambault 2017) that procured pleasure. This capacity becomes particularly salient in a context where, "youth do not dream anymore" (*les jeunes, il ne rêvent plus)*, in the words of the song "Lettre au President" by the Cameroonian rapper Valsero.[73]

The cultivation of this capacity, I suggest, relies on how photographic studios and spaces acting as studios configure time. Studios halt or suspend time. In doing so, they disturb rather than feed into the production of linear time as modernist narratives about camera would have it, a release from "chronotropic imprisonment" (Pinney 1997:134). In the studio, young women transcended their time of waithood: Larissa could depict herself as an owner of a house, as a star, as economically successful woman; this in turn would grant her upward social mobility within Bamiléké social stratification.

Thus, studio photographic performances unsettled linear biographies as chains of successive events. In the case of photographic performances too, "the temporal boundaries are dissolved, temporalities reversed, and temporal loops permitted that may capture not only what has been lost" (Behrend et al 2015:7) but also what has not been (cf. Behrend et al 2015), a form of what Piot calls "nostalgia for the future" (2010). Taken "as if", studio portraits were saturated with the temporality of the "not yet" (cf. Strassler 2012 cf. Wendl and Plessis 1998) but also of "this should have been". As such, the spatialised temporality of photographic performances resonated with the ideas of Christian messianic time (cf. Behrend 2015, Scott nd.) while its temporal futurity with arguments about similarity of photography to other such forms of prise and enchantment such as oratory or sculpture (Adeeko 2012). To paraphrase Strassler

73. Valsero was arrested in 2019, shortly after releasing this song.

(2012:120), the particular ways in which the photographic performance imagined possibility as actuality, I suggest, relied on particular configurations of time and space that photographic studios afforded. In other words, these photographs indexed futures (cf. Barthes 2000 [1981]). But, as studio décor and studio conventions were re-enacted in other photographic performances—especially those mediated by phones and taken by a trained photographer, such as the one staged in a garden by Larissa—this spatialised temporality or spacetime (Munn 1988, Gell 1992) could be reproduced thanks to the cameras of android phones.

Entertaining hope

However, young women also knew that photographic performances—whether at studios, at a lifecycle event, or in a neighbour's garden—inevitably came to an end. After the end of her performance at the start of this chapter, Adelaide changed back into the casual *kaba* she had come in, acknowledging: "the film is over" (*le film est fini*). Handing over the photographs to Adelaide, the photographer, Valery, turned to me to explain: "Photographs are like dreams because they allow you to have dreams even if they are not to be realised."[74] His words convey the sense in which photographic performances created and cultivated capacities and possibilities for reverie (Bachelard 2010 [1960]) despite the experience of the postcolonial subject in the everyday (Mbembe 2001, cf. Tonda 2005) or, as Adelaide put it, looking, enchanted, at the outcomes of her studio performance, "photographs make you travel".

As Adelaide finished looking at the photos I asked if she would like to become a star like Beyoncé or Charlotte Dipanda. Quietly, she replied: "You have seen *Illuminatis* with me.[75] I like Beyoncé and Lady Ponce but to achieve such a success they must have sealed a pact with Satan. I like the way they dress and I would like to have more money to be able to imitate all the dresses of Beyoncé, I would like to afford more places to go in these dresses and then strike these *posters*, to have more fun." Thus, young women distanced themselves from these figures and were critical of the lives they felt such "big women" lead, not least because of the narratives about witchcraft circulating about such figures in the popular imagination (Geschiere 2013). Glamorous lives were morally risky, young women reckoned and they pondered how far they

74. "*C'est comme le rêve les photos, parce que ça permet aux gens d'avoir des rêves irréalisables*."
75. *Illuminatis* is a popular video production with Pentecostal content that interprets stars (among others) and their success in terms of pacts sealed with Satan.

could take such risks. Moreover, young women recognised that their own economic and political conditions prevented them from becoming adults. While they commented upon their performances in terms of a rupture from the everyday, they also highlighted continuity as when stating that what they wanted was, as Larissa said, to "have more dresses and more fun".

This is because young women were aware that beauty, dress and photographs not only required work but also were uncertain enterprises and might not bring about their desired goals. "I was a star and now I am sitting just like this" Adelaide once remarked as she glanced through the digital images on her android phone, including photos taken at the studio. At the time we were sheltering under an awning roof from a rainstorm that had caught us while transiting across the town. "What will I be tomorrow?" she whispered to herself as others, squeezing in with us to avoid the water being splashed by passing cars, glanced over her shoulder. The photos seemed to make them travel too. Her remark reveals the ambivalence that photographic performances generated: dreams that this particular photograph fostered might be at same time possible and not close at hand, pointing to a particular state in-between the two.

Hence, the effects of photographic performances lingered on in young women's everyday. Recall how, as we left the studio, Adelaide stated with the irony characteristic of the postcolonial subject's everyday (Mbembe 1995, 2001): "the film is over". Many of the young women I worked with exhibited similar reflexivity towards the situations in which they were "at their best": dressed and coiffured immaculately, showing off their garments, skills and fashions, at a wedding, a funeral, or when leaving home for school, generating allure in front of the camera lens. They said they knew their desires were hard to achieve and that many of their seduction enterprises would fail (chapter 2). As the storm ended, Larissa closed her digital photographic album which contained images of herself as a star but also other "events of the self" (Enwezor 2010) and we finally left the shelter to find a taxi to return home. On the way she explained that if she kept making and viewing photographs, and engaging in beauty work in general, it was to "entertain herself" (*se distraire*).

To entertain, Turner reminds us (1982), is to hold in-between (*entre-tenir)*. Indeed, Turner's discussions of entertainment as ritual help illuminate how young women's performances afforded something more than just corporeal transformation (1982, 1986).[76] Ritual, theatre and

76. "The liminal period is that time and space betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another. It is when the initiated is neither what he has been nor is what she will be. Characteristic of this liminal period is the appearance of marked ambiguity and inconsistency

everyday life, Turner suggests, are all forms of social drama, intrinsically connected with acting, wherein the difference is not of kind but of the degree of dramaturgy or theatricality involved (ibid).[77] From this perspective, we might appreciate how young women's performances—whether in the studio or in front of the camera lens of an android phone—constituted rituals. Recall, for example, how studio conventions were rehearsed not only through dressing and posing but equally through drawing into the photo background particular elements of the studio décor. These rituals, which punctuated young women's everyday when staged with the phone, for example on the way to the market, or when photographs were viewed *pour se distraire* when stuck in a shed due to a rainstorm, reiterated also the particular temporal reconfigurations that photographic events of the self as liminal performances produced even as they entertained, echoing Larissa's ambivalent claims.

It is here that young women's practices echo arguments about ritual practices as a principal means of articulating the anxieties about the challenges of social reproduction in a neoliberal age, and as a means to deal with the anxieties by allowing one to "envision the world remade" (Weiss 2004:15). This ritualisation has a certain healing quality to it as "(re)picturing possibility as actuality" (Strassler 2012: 122) could move the present moment forward (Miyazaki 2004). If, paraphrasing Strassler, the role of a photographic performance in the studios was to provide for symbolic anticipation of social adulthood, by picturing possibility as actuality and actuality as possibility, they not only formed but also reforming young women's "intangible landscape of desire and sentiment" (ibid.). Through ritualisation, a particular temporality of in-betweenness was reinstated and felt anew; one that allowed for a reiteration of the not-yet, of the unknown.

Following Miyazaki, who draws on Bloch and Benjamin's philosophy of hope, hope is a method that consists in reorientation of knowledge towards "what has not yet become" and the capacity of "what has not yet become" to move the present moment forward (2004). From this perspective we might appreciate how hope, as a radical reorientation of the temporality of embodied knowledge (cf. Miyazaki 2004), is reproduced and maintained as an outcome of a ritualised photographic performance—when the body wears a new *poster*, as young women

of meaning and the emergence of liminal demonic and monstrous figures who represent within themselves ambiguities and inconsistencies. As ambitious figures they mediate between alternative or opposing contexts and this are important in bringing about their transformation" (Turner 1982:113). In fact, stars like Beyoncé and the president's wife (whose hairstyles young women imitated) were considered by some informants as literally demonic figures. Discourses about stars in these terms were influenced by the church.

77. Indeed Turner is instructive in reminding us about the specific post-Renaissance origins of the Western distinction between the theatre stage and everyday life.

stitch new dresses, style new hairdos, and photograph themselves each time they have new clothes. Hope is further renewed in an act of embodied perception when looking at one's and other's images, when viewing or updating one's photographic display at home on a wall, or on the phone on Facebook. That is, photographic performances were young women's bodily "method of hope" (cf. Miyazaki 2004). And insofar as hope is bodily renewed in everyday acts of self-fashioning amidst the challenges of the postcolony, through photographic performances and viewing of photograph young women achieved transformations of perception. In other words, their performances generated hope they would find suitable husbands and good employment, and travel or migrate aboard; as the studio advertisement had it, that "the best is still to come" (cf. Tonda 2005 cf. Bernault 2015). Hope, thus, is performative affect.

If young women entertained hope, they also circulated it as the photographs were further distributed to their kin. Adelaide had ten prints of her styles in the envelope as we left the studio, half of which she gave out to her older married sisters, aunts and uncles (her own parents were dead). Three such prints were kept in her bag during a funeral ceremony back in the village. As the dances ended and we sat at the table for the meal, Adelaide pulled a photograph from her bag, gifting it to her mother's sister. The aunt showed the image to the others present, not only at the table, but also other (important) guests she knew at the ceremony. Several women asked the aunt to take them to Adelaide so they could learn more about the dress style, and the aunt could not hide how pleased she was. A few months later I visited the aunt at her home, and Adelaide's image was prominently displayed in her living room, so that the gaze of a guest seated on the sofa would be directed at it. The aunt explained to me that while she was worried that Adelaide was getting old and had not married yet, the image gave her hope (*ca ma donne du espoir*) as to how Adelaide would manage her future.

Here, we might ask how the generation of such affective states of hope relates to wider economic and political conditions of crisis (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). That is, how far such engagements in beauty work—which reinforce a conviction that consumption and body are paths, albeit laborious, to bring about desired futures (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Tonda 2005) and encourage young women to disregard failure—are, actually a sort of cruel hope? Cruel attachments typify, according to Berlant (2009, 2011), an affective landscape of neoliberalism, rendering subjects attached to compromised conditions of possibility, here young women's photographic performances, merely to (re)attach them to waithood out of which there seems to be no immediate way out (Honwana 2010). From this vantage point, the

repetition or reiteration of beauty work—for example, through a photographic performance or viewing of a photograph—constantly (re)assures that "if promise is not delivered today, it will be delivered tomorrow" (Berlant 2009:94-95, 2011) postponing fulfilment incessantly, and indeed cruelly, for it seems not be achieved. But young women's performances were ambivalent liminal periods, and their outcomes were indeterminate. Thus, beauty work functioned rather as a technology of (im)patience (cf. Berlant 2011) and each reiteration potentially rendered young women attached to the compromised conditions of possibility in their everyday (i.e. being stuck in waithood) whilst reinvigorating hope, that one day these conditions could become less compromised: that they could attain respectable adulthood. Thus, a sense of possibility was inherent in this dialectic, and its outcome remained open-ended for it was simply unknown (di Nunzio 2019).

Young women's photographic practices did not only serve to "entertain repression" or more aptly in relation to my wider ethnographic context, to "beautify repression" paraphrasing Nyamnjoh and Fokwang's arguments about music in Cameroon (2005). Beauty work did not function simply as a distraction from the political authoritarianism and economic downturn that Cameroon has experienced for over two decades, and offer, in place of mundane reality, experiences of pleasure (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991) fuelled by neoliberal globalisation and aesthetic capitalism (Illouz 2017, 1997). Rather, I propose, it allowed them to endure (Povinelli 2011) under conditions of duress, through economic crisis and political repression actualising a tenuous sense of possibility. As such it generated a "certain rush of energy" (Mazarella 2017) that under such conditions was challenging to generate and maintain, not least because it required work which could be exhausting, as the next chapter will discuss.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined how young women fashioned themselves as stars when they ventured to photographic studios, and through photographic performances in general. The first section examined the discourses that surround dress and photography as distinctively female practices in contemporary Cameroon, in short, that "women love photographs" (Mustafa 2002). I have showed how such discourses are historically grounded in local ideas about intimate economies wherein textiles and dress are male gifts to women and how photographs extend possibilities for women to display clothes (cf. Wendl 2001, Mustafa 2002). Early state-building

processes have influenced this gendered perception by positioning men as professional producers of photographs. The contemporary perception of women primarily as consumers of photography, has, I have shown, been sharpened by the liberalisation of trade and media in Cameroon which has caused an influx of images of female beauty and the body as a central means of achieving wealth and success; and contributed to young women's view of beauty as work (cf. Comraoff and Comaroff 2000). If such transformations in the wider political economy can be seen as fostering the commodification of the female body as an object for display, the section also underlined how photographs as objects for display reveal women's skill and industriousness. That is, if women love photographs it is because photographs, like dress, are a surface that can be crafted (cf. Mustafa 2002).

The second section analysed the way that posing works and the poses young women strike as they stand in front of the camera lens. I argued that *posters* amount to a bodily technique (Mauss 1973 [1935]) that is taught through socialisation from early childhood. In order to strike a pose and deliver an alluring performance young woman have to train their performative capacity (Ferguson 1999), which may occur at the studio itself. *Poster* skills can be looked down at or up to, and when successfully staged can encourage tangible benefits. Thus, I suggested that the skill of posing is used to claim attention and enhance one's presence in public space, being part of beauty work. As *poster* skills entail learning the display value of commodities (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991), they reveal how young women's techniques of enhancing one's presence partake in aesthetic capitalism, reiterating particular structures of feeling that fashion young women as aesthetic subjectivities (cf. Warnier 2007, cf. Tonda 2005, Bernault 2005).

The third section turned to an examination of why studios continue to be popular today especially for young women who are avid owners and users of a prime status marker—their android smartphones. I suggested that if young women in particular, and the wider public in general, frequent studios today, this is because of how studios afford projections of the possible in the actual, soliciting a temporal state or attitude of reverie, the "as if" (Strassler 2012, Pinney 1997) in a sensory way. These possibilities, in how they intertwine the actual and the potential rely, I suggest, on a particular configuration of time and space (Behrend 2017, Munn 1988, Pinney 1997). This in turn can be traced to the early days of studio photography in Cameroon, and its theatricality in particular, and is today re-enacted in photographic performances.

The fourth section looked further into the capacity for dreaming that photographic performances generated. The section suggested that the particular training of the embodied capacity that posing entails should be seen as productive against the struggles of the everyday. This is because the different poses that young women perform in the studio amount to anticipatory actions that redirect the present moment forward—the "as if" is also the liminal temporality of in-betweenness pointing to the "not yet" (Turner 1982). Thus, I argue, the repetition of different performances young women deliver while generating entertainment for them is affectively performative of hope, for it re-inscribes the present in the future (cf. Miyazaki 2004).

Thus, where this thesis argues beauty work objectifies female bodies but is also a set of embodied skills that generate sensory effects, this chapter has shown the skills needed to pose. Throughout the chapter has approached photography and studio photography in particular in material and sensory terms, thereby offering new approach to literature on these issues. In doing so it enabled us to move beyond discussions of photographic performances as producing selves or identities (e.g. Pinney 1997, Strassler 2012, Behrend 2002, Mustafa 2002). Instead I have shown how such performances are geared to produce certain affective states. Answering the main question of this thesis about what visual self-fashioning does and affords women to do, the chapter showed how ritualised photographic performances and (re)viewing their outcomes allowed young women to feel that, as the studio advertisement promises, "the best is still to come".



Figure 30. Photograph of Mirelle that was displayed at her parents' house, depicting her against a photoshopped background of waterfalls. A copy of that image was also in an album that her kin showed to visitors. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

FIVE:

Entrepreneurs of love

One Sunday evening we were at Mirelle's parents' unfinished house where the family had gathered to discuss the marital problems of one of Mirelle's aunts. Throughout the meeting Mirelle, assisted by two cousins, served food and drinks to the many guests engaged in heated debate about reasons for and against the aunt's desire to leave her house, her husband and children. As food was eaten and beers drunk, one of the guests, another aunt, started to get ready to return to her home in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon. Having questioned Mirelle at length before dinner about, amongst other topics, her marriage prospects and job, just before heading to the door she went to the shelf and pulled out a photograph of Mirelle from an album she had looked through earlier. A copy of the same photograph was displayed

in the living room (figure 30). In the photoshopped image, Mirelle posed in front of waterfalls, wearing a colorous *ensemble* (skirt and top made out of the same textile) and a neat hairstyle. "I will search for a husband for you [with this photograph]!" the aunt exclaimed waving the photograph around. Mirelle's mother called Mirelle from the kitchen, where she spent most of the time that day, and they approached her to doublecheck the photograph she had chosen. Looking at it closely, they agreed in an approving tone: "this photograph is good" (*ta photo est bien*). Mirelle then photographed the image with her camera phone and gave it back to her aunt, who put it in her bag, said her goodbyes, and left for the bus station.

Photographs were widely used by kin to help young women catch husbands; young women also actively undertook similar pursuits themselves. In this chapter I ask how young women mobilised digital photographs to fashion intimate relations, and how increased access to digital media affected the realms of courtship and marriage for the young women this thesis describes.

This chapter is grounded in an understanding of intimacy as "social relationships that are—or give the impression of being—physically and/or emotionally close, personal, sexually intimate, private, caring and loving" (Constable 2009:50). The scholarship on intimate relationships has been approached through the lens of marriage and love (Fortes 2018 [1949], Thomas and Cole 2009), commodification and sexuality (Zelizer 2005, Constable 2009), and in relation to new technologies and new media uptake (Barber 2007, Pype 2019, Archambault 2017), teasing out constructions of private and public spheres (Berlant 1998).

In Africa in particular, but also elsewhere (e.g. Constable 2003), several authors have examined the "transformations of intimacy" (Giddens 1992) brought about by technologies such as letter writing (Barber 2007), as well as digital technologies such as the internet, matchmaking websites, text messaging and more generally the use of mobile phones (e.g. Archambault 2017, Johnson-Hanks 2007, Pype 2019). Much of this literature argues that new forms of intimacy are imagined and practiced, and new ways of being and relating fostered, with the uptake of new technology. This is illustrated, for example, by Archambault's description of Mozambique youth navigating intimacy away from their elders using mobile phones (2017). In Cameroon, Johnson-Hanks discusses Internet-mediated marriages among elite Beti women and suggests that in their searches for white men abroad, women transpose what she calls the "schemata" related to honour, consumption and self-discipline that have long informed Beti conceptions of gendered labour exchange in bridewealth marriage. Thus, she argues, when women discuss the

messages they send and receive as they wait in cybercafés, they cultivate honour and self-discipline. If Archambault (2017) stresses ruptures in constructions of intimate relationships, Johnson-Hanks highlights continuities (2007). I build on these two studies in the discussions below to show how new technologies, with specific reference to Facebook, reconfigure and reproduce practices and ideas about courtship and marriage. Rather than focusing on the textual domain, however, I examine the visual domain: the photographs displayed and circulated on Facebook.[78]

Several studies argue that, in order to understand ideas of love and intimacy, the ideologies of emotional attachment that underpin intimate relations must be considered. As Cole and Thomas remind us, in Africa—as elsewhere (e.g. Zelizer 2005)—intimate attachments are forged through exchange relationships, and people have grappled with the ways in which monetisation strains this practice (2009:23). In this vein Hunter (2010), for example, argues that ideas of the male provider role persist among South Africans in KwaZulu-Natal as young women seek multiple relationships with men and take their material support as evidence of emotional commitment, while men find it challenging to forge marriages and support families if they are unable to provide material support. On the other hand, Cole (2006) demonstrates how among Malagasy conceptions of love are forged that are disentangled from material support and exchange and how ideologies of emotional attachment elaborated, and intimate relationships spoken about as solely for emotional attachment or because of the need for money.

Discussions of the relationship between love and money also imply questions of commodification. If Johnson-Hanks (2007) shows how new technologies of consumption (such as the internet) facilitate the commodification of marital introduction, Constable reminds us that the processes of commodification of intimacy should not be an analytical end in themselves, but a starting point for analyses of gendered relationships, social inequalities and capitalist transformations (2009:55). Archambault, in her recent monograph on the impact of mobile phone usage on intimate relations in Inhambane, Mozambique, is helpful in approaching such questions (2017). She argues that mobile phones open up a new space of intimacy unmediated by kin, among youth, and that such spaces enter wider regimes of visibility and invisibility—what she calls a "politics of pretence"—which allow young men

78. Miller's (comparative) studies on Facebook discuss photographs. However, while many different countries are covered, the studies omit Africa altogether, nor are they concerned with intimacy as such, but rather with changing forms of sociality and communication (e.g. Miller 2011, Miller and Sinanan 2017). This chapter articulates one of Miller and Sinanan's basic arguments about the culturally-specific forms that social media take (2017).

and women to lead fulfilling lives by covering things up. The commodification of intimacy that mobile phones participate in enable normative gender ideas to be subverted when, for example, young women make claims upon multiple men for airtime, money and other opportunities through bipping (Archambault 2017). Men, on the other hand, may find it increasingly challenging to meet such demands; in the South African case, discussed by Hunter (2010), ultimately some women end up providing financial resources to their boyfriends and young men start to date older women. As such Archambault (2017) also shows how the commodification of intimacy foster new forms of intimacy (Constable 2009, Geschiere 2013). While Archambault goes beyond a discussion of new media as representation to focus on the materiality of mobile phones—for example, the deletion of message logs to keep relations secret, or constant bipping to pester for financial support (2017)—we might also ask what effects these new practices have on the ideas of intimacy held by young women (and men).

This chapter seeks to answer this question in the Cameroonian case, framing what young women do with images offline and online to establish love relationships as a form of emotional work (Hochschild 2012 [1983], cf. Pype 2019). Following Hochschild (2012 [1983)], emotional *labour* refers to the management of the feelings of the self and other within labour processes in view of capital accumulation, while emotional *work* is related to non-wage contexts (Hochschild 2012 [1983]). While Archambault focuses on exchange as the glue that makes emotions stick (2017), we might ask what emotions accompany the production of love. Pype, writing on what she calls "digital marriages" in Congo, Kinshasa (2019), considers the construction of intimate practices online as similar to those offline but differentiated by ideas of seriousness versus play. While invoking the notion of affective labour to denote the practices of young Kinois women, she does not take it as analytic (Pype 2019). Building on these studies I bring material and representational approaches together with a focus on affect and emotions and ask what effects—sensory and bodily—digital and non-digital marriage pursuits generated among young Bamiléké women I worked with in Yaoundé. While focusing on the circulation of digital photographs I ask how such affective practices sat within sociohistorical constructions of love, intimacy and marriage to shed light on how love and affect in particular, and the management of one's own and others' emotions in general, pertain to the female sphere of work.

Where this thesis argues that visual self-fashioning commodifies female bodies as objects for display and that such objectifications are also set of valued skills, this chapter illustrates this

claim by focusing on digital editing skills. Furthering the thesis's argument that beauty work generates sensory effects, this chapter turns to their limits. Answering the main thesis question about what dress and photographs afford young women to do, this chapter shows how displayed photographs allow young women to manifest themselves as industrious and enlarge their net for suitable marriage candidates, that is, their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017), which in turn requires work.

The first section of this chapter examines how young women aim to catch a husband offline and to show how such enterprises are and were often mediated by a printed image and by kin. But, as kin are often far away, and as young women want to reach out to men both in the country and abroad, they often find recourse in establishing intimate relations through digital and online means. Young women do not view kin-mediated husband-catching enterprises as in opposition to those they run on their own (cf. Archambault 2017). Rather all these enterprises are complementary means of ensuring wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). The principal means of navigating intimacy online are photographic Facebook displays which make the (disembodied) body and appearance the principal ways of mediating intimacy (Illouz 2017). It is to these issues that the second section turns, and discusses how young women edit their photographs and manage their online photographic displays: skills they have often learned from young men. Digital online display requires young women to visually elicit—that is, objectify through photo editing—the emotions of young men and in doing so manage their own emotions associated with such work. The last section delves further into the emotional and other aspects of husband-catching enterprises to reveal not only that, as young women say, "love is an enterprise" but also that running such enterprises can have high emotional and other costs, leading to a kind of love burnout. This is turn points to the limits of sensory effects afforded by beauty work.

Catching a husband offline

"Catching" a husband or *un gars* is how young women talked about their efforts to find a husband; married women in turn referred to their efforts to make their man stay at home rather than having mistresses (*deuxième bureau*) and going outside as "keeping" a husband or *gars*. Both expressions highlight not only the active way in which women were involved in husband prospection, but also the prolonged time and patience required to succeed. Catching a husband

was sometimes likened to catching a fish and men were compared to the round dried fish sold in markets across West Africa. This comparison was an explicit theme in a contemporary pop song, "Poisson Fumé" by the popular Cameroonian singer Mani Bella which pumped from the speakers of Yaoundé's bars at the time of my fieldwork; young women whistled its melody and imitated Mani Bella's dance moves in front of mirrors at home and in clubs. The song advises women to handle men carefully for they are sensitive and can easily break—get annoyed, angry and violent—if they are challenged directly, for example about their whereabouts at night if they return home very late. Instead, the song encourages women not to reveal their own anger and to be gentle and manage their man indirectly, for example, serve him food, smile, ask how his day was, and only then ask about his whereabouts at night to discern if he had frequented a *deuxième bureau*. The lyrics encourage women to conceive of intimate relationships in terms of the management of their own emotions and those of men.

Catching (*attraper*) was also explained in terms of attracting (*attirer*), the way a bait attracts a fish to approach and swallow it, or how a young woman in a fashionable dress attracts a man through her alluring *nyanga* performance and he falls for her. The alternating between husband and *gars* points to the uncertainty young women felt about marriage: they might desire to find husband, but they might well also end up catching only *un gars,* and stay in a loose, informal relationship or union (*viens on reste*) lacking the social and economic advantages of marriage. This means of course that young men were also likely to end up not making it as a husband and remained only *un gars,* resonating with the wider economic and political conditions that account for youth negotiating waithood in Cameroon as elsewhere (Honwana 2005; see introduction).

Mirelle was in her late twenties and studying computer science. Like the other young women I worked with, she often voiced complaints about how difficult it was to "catch a husband", given that the ways to determine the best candidates were compromised. Young women like her lived in big urban zones, Mirelle explained, and attended universities where, by and large, they did not know their peers. For their mothers, living in villages, Mirelle reckoned, "it was easier because families knew each other and one could find out who a particular person was" and "to know someone is to know his house, to know his family, to know where s/he goes (*comment il marche*)" she explained. "You can observe your neighbours in the village but is

my neighbour at the university here?" Mirelle asked rhetorically.[79] This work in the village was often done by grandmothers, she continued, and while carrying out household chores at the compound, they could easily but covertly observe their neighbours, "who comes to visit them and when." When going to trade at the market, they would get filled in with the latest gossip from the neighbouring villages and towns.[80] In the city, this was less possible and whereas young women wished to choose whom they would marry, they also often asked themselves how—*comment attraper un gars ou un mari?*—admitting that they felt unsure how to do it and expressing a feeling of being burdened by having to manage husband-catching task on their own in such conditions.

Moreover, the ways in which Mirelle could go about husband-catching enterprises on her own were limited, at least offline. When she saw a young man she was interested in, at the university for example, she said she would dress seductively so as to attract his attention and be approached by him. "It is out of the question that I approach a man on the street"—she raised her voice—"only a *prostituée* approaches a man!" (chapter 2). Her dress strategies did not always work for, as visual illocutionary acts, they relied on the uptake of the audience (Austin 1975 [1962]). But, Mirelle said regretfully, there was not much more she could do if she were to catch a husband on her own and remain respectable for herself and her kin. Luckily, Mirelle added in relief, her aunt (in the opening vignette of this chapter) had taken her photograph to present her with a potential candidate. Young women's individual husband-catching enterprises were limited, but when catches happened offline they were often kin-mediated and collective enterprises, as would have been the case of Mirelle's grandmother spotting young men for her daughter in the village.

Young women welcomed this help, to an extent. When I asked Mirelle how she felt about her aunt taking a photograph to find a candidate for her, she responded, seeming surprised by my question: "it will increase my chances!" Many young women (and men) admitted that while wanting to choose a partner themselves, they would not refuse candidates presented by their kin, not only out of respect but unless they had an alternate—and better—option to propose themselves. That is, young women acted in their intimate pursuits in such a way so to increase their chance of marrying the best candidate—wealthy and serious man, "faithful", Christian,

79. While some of these were young women's actual neighbours in the student quarters, young women did not know their kin.
80. Other families and their children were also observed to avoid marriages with families whose members might be involved in sorcery. For how families and individuals were categorised in this matter see Nyamnjoh (2002:121).

from a good family and of the same ethnic group—and thus kept as many options open as possible, while different images were meant to lure different types of candidates (chapter 2, see below). Young women and kin certainly preferred to circulate different types of photographs, showing off different styles (figure 31), but all these styles were ultimately aimed at depicting women as fashionable and industrious. Catching a husband offline, which happened most often through the mediation of kin, and *catching a gars* online which as we shall see most often happened on one's own, were thus not considered as opposite but complementary means (cf. Archambault 2017). This was related to uncertainty about relationships potentially leading to a more stable union or marriage (see introduction) thus the importance of acting in such a way as to accumulate wealth in prospects (Guyer and Belinga 1995, Johnson Hanks 2017).



Figure 31. Different choices of images to circulate in search for husband. To the left, a photo chosen by kin to be circulated offline and online, to the right a photo chosen by a young woman to be posted online. The mother later explained her chosen photo to me as it showed her daughter as *une responsable*. Although her daughter agreed that this could attract a serious man, she worried that it was not appealing enough as it did not reveal her forms without revealing her body *(faire ressortir tes formes sans toutefois montrer ton corps),* thus she preferred the photograph on the right. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

The contemporary ways of using photographs in view of establishing intimate relations were not new and indeed many women of Mirelle's mother's generation in Yaoundé narrated how they got, as they said, "seduced by the photograph". For example, Mirelle's mother's sister, Ma Seraphine, narrated how her own mother travelled once to Yaoundé from a village near

Mbouda in the Western Region and came back with a black-and-white photograph of a young man holding a suitcase. It was a son of their neighbour, from a good family, she stressed. He was working in the Ministry of Communication, her mother had told Ma Seraphine, then in her late teens, as she showed the photograph. “It was rare to have a photograph like this back in those days, *e-kie* what a man he is, not only looking like this but offers a photograph! I was pleased.” Although I did not manage to find out if the image was requested by Ma Seraphine’s mother or given by the young men spontaneously, Ma Seraphine agreed to marry him. The bridewealth payment commenced and a few weeks later she was alone on a bus, heading to Yaoundé. She recalled she cried of loneliness and because she was leaving her family. But as she arrived, and her husband’s uncle came to pick her, and brought her to the house, her mood brightened “when I saw the [big] house”. Her husband and his kin treated her well. She found confirmation of this in a form of provider love (Hunter 2010): “he was paying for my clothes”, and in that he did not ask too many questions when she went out (*il ne dérange pas*) alluding to gender separation (Ferme 2001). Ma Seraphine stayed in the marriage until the death of her husband a few years before I met her.

The practice of sending photographs from towns to villages, my older interlocutors recalled, was so common at the height of rural-urban migrations in the 1970s–1980s that a Bamiléké singer sang in a local language, warning village woman about the black-and-white photos of the time which, as many informants commented, portrayed a man who: “has a beautiful suit jacket but its pockets are empty!” (figure 32). The song was a warning about taking appearances and, concomitantly, photographic representations as truth for, as Ma Seraphine continued: “it might be revealing a man as wealthy through the way he was dressed, you will think he is a civil servant whereas after you confirm your interest and agree to marry him, the bridewealth payments starts, you get on the bus to arrive in Yaoundé to find out that he is just a taxi man!” Recall Ma Seraphine describing how she was seduced by a photograph of her husband-to-be: the allure of the photograph had done its work. In spite of numerous deceptions, and the instability between the signifier and the signified in the photographic representation of the self (Pinney 1997), in the context of migration and urbanisation these images preserve the idea that physical attraction is an important part of a successful courtship and marriage.



Figure 32. “He has a beautiful suit jacket but its pockets are empty!” Photo credit: Jacques Toussele, Studio Photo Jacques, Mbouda, Western Region, Cameroon (c.1980)

When printed photographs were circulated in this manner, they legitimated visual economies of affect (cf. Poole 2005, Ahmed 2004) wherein the emotional and material spheres were co-constitutive (Thomas and Cole 2009, Cole 2006, Hunter 2010). Because historically men migrated to urban zones and towns more than women—to work in factories, plantations and in administration—and among Bamiléké marriage is virilocal—it was mostly images of men that travelled back to the villages during the period of heightened rural-urban migration. In other words, the circulation of these photographs was embedded in a wider insertion of Bamiléké men as labour into urban economies. The black and white full-length (i.e. the whole body) printed images depicted the young men as successful urban businessmen or civil servants, that

is, in ways that young women and their kin would find attractive in marriage considerations[81] as they signified economic achievement and moral readiness to take on responsibilities such as marriage and building a house. The photographs solicited attraction through the way they portrayed the self, which focused less on the body than on apparel (chapter 4), speaking to the candidate's status, wealth and prestige (cf. Illouz 2012). That is, the photographs were intended to engage individual desire based both on bodily attractiveness and on projecting status through apparel and in this way to increase the chance of a lasting marriage, including in the polygamous unions (cf. Ferme 2001, cf. Cole and Thomas 2009, cf. Archambault 2017).

Note the ways in which emotions were managed in creating intimate relations through the intermediary of the printed photograph and kin. Contracting marriages was and is considered an uncertain enterprise for a number of reasons (Nyamnjoh 2002). As already mentioned, although village networks may exist in the city, it is more difficult to observe a person and his/her kin. Moreover, as young women and men asserted, one cannot know "who the person is"—this claim articulates not only Grassfields notions of personhood (Nyamnjoh 2002:121) but also the impact of transnational migrations that have altered family composition (Alpes 2017)—kin often said they did not know what the life of a person who had "fallen to the bush" (migrated abroad) was actually like out there. The generation of my interlocutors' mothers and aunts, like Ma Seraphine, who married at the height of the rural-urban migration, recalled moving away from family as a difficult experience. In this context, an appealing photograph of a potential suitor presented an image of a bright future. It dissipated uncertainty around how the marriage would turn out and mitigated anxiety about moving away. The emotional work (Hochschild 2012 [1983]) of managing one's own emotions of uncertainty about the candidate and his family, and eliciting his desire, fell upon kin rather than, as is true today, upon oneself.

Today, these "geographies of intimacy" (Hunter 2010) have shifted: it is an image of a young woman that travels from the city to, potentially, another city, but ideally abroad. This reflects the fact that in the past women in the villages were less likely to have access to the technology of photography. Also, this is intertwined with a change from rural-urban to transnational migrations that considerably altered the generational dimensions of catching a husband. Then, as now, it was men who migrated or "fell to the bush" (IOM 2009, Alpes 2014), not least because it was preferred that women stay close to kin to provide domestic labour and, in the

81. In a context where relationships are constituted and maintained through material exchange to meet desires and needs i.e. achieve sensory or affective ends (cf. Piot 1991, cf. Piot 1999) gifting the photograph to the other family constituted and/or maintained an affective and economic relation between individuals (love) and kin (friendship).

past, to cultivate fields. If travel between urban and rural zones was restricted during the Ahidjo regime (1960–1982) today mothers and aunts face even greater barriers to visiting their sons in Nigeria, South Africa, France, Germany, America, Dubai, China or elsewhere. The digital realm: the internet, social networks and mobile phone applications offers ways to circumvent this and digital photographs circulate from home to abroad (and from abroad to home). Yet older family members tend to be less computer literate and tech-savvy, or own poorer-quality or older models of mobile phones. Thus, the young women I worked with surfed the net themselves in search of potential husbands, preferably "bushfallers", but also young men living in other cities in Cameroon. As they pondered *comment attraper un mari* with digitised photographs, they continued and transformed the ways in which their mothers and grandmothers had used printed photographs (Vokes 2019) and navigated intimacy (Pype 2019, Constable 2009) an issue to which the following turns.

Catching a *gars* online

An important means of catching a husband online, my young female friends instructed me, was Facebook. Facebook started to be popular in Cameroon in the late 2000s and all the young women I worked with had installed it on their android phones. This does not mean that they had not had accounts before this; rather, previously internet usage costs were higher and phones were less powerful. In 2000, new mobile phone providers appeared on the market (MTN and Orange) and new trade agreements between China and Cameroon (2000s) meant an influx of cheap android devices. The national power company (Sonel) was privatised and sold to American investors (AES Sonel), creating the hope for a larger and more reliable electricity infrastructure and internet, which mobile phone providers in particular widely advertised.

Unlike the *yoyettes* of Yaoundé (Johnson-Hanks 2007), young women resorted to Facebook to find their best Cameroonian or African candidate, rather than to dating websites to catch a white husband. This is because the latter has become an infamous activity in Cameroon. Two French-funded Cameroonian films, *Blanc d'Eyenga* and its sequel, depicted young women engaging in such pursuits as greedy, trying to financially exploit both poor and wealthy white men. The movies critiqued an idea of love in which material and emotional aspects are mutually constitutive i.e. where material support expresses emotional commitment (Thomas and Cole 2009). In addition, numerous rumours (*kongossa*) circulating in *radio trottoir*—the streets—

warned young women not to engage in such pursuits because of the risk of sexual exploitation by white men. Thus, as popular representations had it, young women who frequented cybercafés in search of relationships with men must be desperate. After all, they had risked not only their respectability by being spotted on an outing to a cybercafé but also exposed themselves to potential sexual assault and witchcraft. As the hero of that movie was an unemployed French man, many young women thought such men must be especially prevalent on dating websites. Despair and readiness to take risks in pursuits of such men, could only speak, as Mirelle explained, to the numerous failures of a young woman's previous attempts to catch men in Cameroon. Secrecy surrounding the pursuit of husband-catching enterprises online was not so much to hide one's innermost feelings towards a romantic prospect (cf. Thomas and Cole 2006, cf. Illouz 2012), but because of the desire to maintain respectability for oneself and for kin. If the most trusted relatives were aware of these practices (as Mirelle's mother was), young women, unlike their Beti counterparts described by Johnson-Hanks (2007), tended to conceal them from others because of a fear of being discovered and competed with. Yet, almost all the young women I knew engaged in similar practices; this was a public secret (Taussig 1999).

As night approached, Mirelle sat on a sofa with her android phone and opened her Facebook account. She explained its advantages over other sites: "on Facebook you can look at the same time for jobs, fashions and husbands." Apart from the omnipresent religious memes, commentaries about gender relations, and images of stars, Mirelle's Facebook wall was plastered with full or half-length portrait photographs of Mirelle in various styles from different occasions, from lifecycle ceremonies to the everyday. Most portrayed her alone, prominently figuring dress details, at times at the expense of her head; such displays (figure 33) were typical for aspiring fashionistas who wanted to boost details of their dresses (chapter 3). Mirelle carefully chose three images taken at a wedding to upload to her account, with three different dresses from the ceremonies at a church, the district council office and the evening party respectively. A male photographer friend had edited them for her, brightening the skin tone and increasing contrast to make her dress better stand out. But, even as she uploaded these images, she quickly became enervated and disappointed. Another young woman had uploaded photographs a few minutes earlier, showing her in styles that Mirelle found enchanting and unique (figure 34). She scrolled through congratulatory comments of other young women from her university class and started questioning me about the images she had uploaded, doubting. She asked what I liked and disliked about her styles, explaining at length how she had worked

on their details to make them unique and was jealous of. By the end, she was doubting if she should keep them at all because they did not make her look so good. Ultimately, she decided to post them and considered this a good decision because her phone kept buzzing, signalling "likes" and messages. Our ensuing conversation turned into figuring out how to respond, when and to whom.

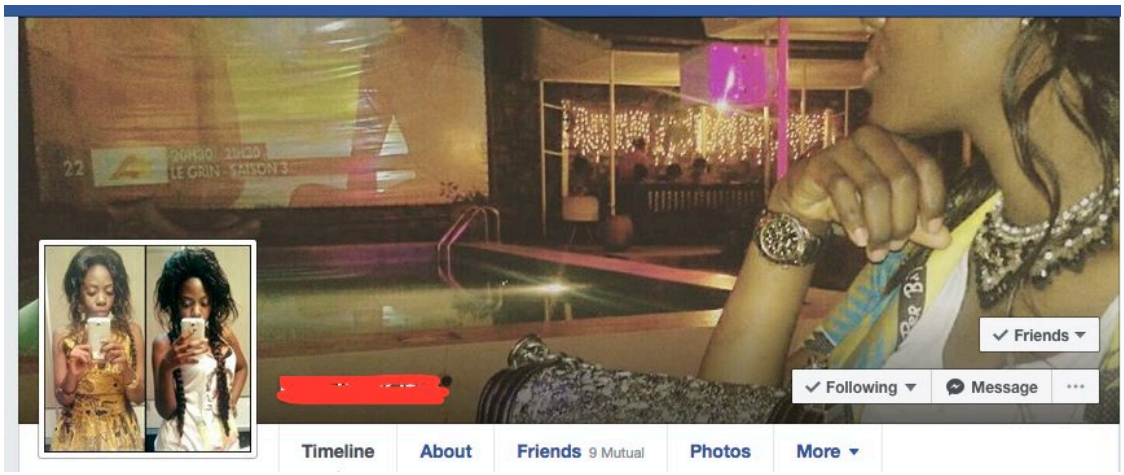


Figure 33. Mirelle's Facebook header. Photo credit: Used with permission (2016)



Figure 34. Photographs displayed by Mirelle's competitor. Her style was one of the first *combinaisons pantalons* to be stitched in young women's circles, to the great acclaim of many followers. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2016)

It was the materiality of display—the immediate feedback on one's own display, and seeing others' styles which might be newer or more creative—that turned young women's practices

into doubt-ridden endeavours. The apps installed on android phones alerted one as soon as a potential suitor sent a message, but equally as soon as other young women—fashion friends and competitors—uploaded new photographs to Facebook. Young women kept their phones close at all times, be it at school, in taxis on the way to the market, during church services or in bed at night, and usually prioritised answering messages even when surrounded by other activities. As phones buzzed incessantly, they compelled young women to, if not answer right away, at least to think about an answer. Not responding immediately was either a part of purposeful strategy or because they admitted they were unsure how to catch *un gars* or a husband online. After Mirelle had uploaded her photographs we sat through the night, chatting with several men using her phone, until she finally admitted to being in urgent and immediate need of sleep, remarking, as her eyes closed, "it was easier for our mothers".[82]

Facebook, young women reckoned, was a public space where the audience was broad and large. This was seen as a major advantage over other social media, mobile phone chat apps such as WhatsApp, and specific sites such as those for matchmaking, fashion magazines or indeed employment sites. Facebook revealed one's social relationships, which was seen as crucial to gather necessary knowledge about candidates that, at the opening of the previous section Mirelle lamented, had been precious but had been lost. Moreover, Facebook was associated with certain aspirations, through the advertisements showing youth using the site which mobile phone providers had erected around town. These portrayed fashionable young women and men having fun at a bar or at the beach. The general message was one of leisure and of an aspirational middle class, which young women certainly aspired to and hoped to choose their potential husbands from. In other words, for young women who attempted to catch a husband online, Facebook seemed to ensure that the net they cast was both wide and selective.

Yet, drawing on Nyamnjoh's description of the offline pursuits of Dakarois women, when online, young women were "fishing in troubled waters" (2005), as they themselves knew well, though these troubles manifested themselves rather differently. Contrary to offline pursuits, Mirelle's reaction to her competitors posting their own images shows that what social media brought into sharp relief was the repetition and standardisation of images. This resonates with Illouz's observations of the changes in intimacy as such relations enter the digital realm. The internet brought what she calls an "economy of abundance" into the domain of love (2017:216).

82. At the time of writing it was clear that what young women did on Facebook with photographs is similar to what Tinder later achieved. Tinder was neither used nor known by the young women I worked with as it had only just been launched at the time of my fieldwork.

This economy consists in principles of interchangeability, standardisation, rationality and endless choice, in other words, the logic of mass consumption (ibid). We might note however, the gendered specificity of this claim in the context this thesis describes.

That is, a similar logic was in place prior to the internet with the so-called love brokers. These were and are often young men living in university quarters at the campus who had (and to an extent still have) laminated photographic albums full of printed photographs of different young women. These young women included their peers in their study programmes, from their villages, and their female neighbours at the campus, whom they actively marketed to their male peers. This love brokering through male peers constituted, as one of the young men who did this still today explained, a related means to kin-mediated marriages, as the love broker vouched for each party whose meeting he arranged to the other, for he knew their villages of origin, who their kin were, and how educated the young women was. However, he also mentioned that he saw less interest in his brokering today, something he attributed to digital photo albums. What was new about internet-mediated intimacy was that it altered this gendered dynamic, allowing young women to browse through their own digital catalogues (as well as those of young men), and to enter the dating and marriage market as brokers for themselves.

Followers, as it was made clear earlier, can also be competitors (chapter 3). Moreover, on Facebook, "everyone can see you", and indeed this could lead to drama, as when appearance or a dress style was commented upon as ugly. "Everyone would immediately know" Mirelle said, and told how this had happened to a friend who had to delete her account. This generated much anxiety—young women were afraid that their images would receive disapproving comments, that the images would be taken as a sign of their despair of finding a husband, or that their enterprises would be revealed, thus compromising their respectability; that their followers might turn out to be competitors and try to catch their own *gars,* and that a man would turn out not to be what he seemed. Thus, they tried to conceal their husband-catching enterprises from their peers, except from what they considered closest relationships (e.g. mother or *amie intime*). When talked about or commented upon the displayed images were revealed in terms of fashion, styles and skills displayed (cf. Archambault 2017, cf Gell 1988) and not talked about in terms of being directed at establishing/maintaining particular intimate relationships (Taussig 1999). This concealment produced secrecy and invested husband-catching pursuits with value.

Thus, fashionable online displays demanded emotional work (Hochschild 2003 [1983]). As young women desired to remain respectable in the eyes of the kin, as competition online was rife, they ran their enterprises alone, seeking to shield themselves from judgement and competition (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2007, Pype 2019). At the same time online activity generated increased concern with one's skills and competences while the urban conditions, absence of kin and lack of trust among young women made them keep the emotions such pursuits generated to themselves. To be sure, Facebook allowed for involvement in transactional sex (Cole 2004) as well as husband-catching, but also in relations that could generate money without sex (chapter 2) as well as other relationships based on affection and sexual pleasure. Such relationships could not to be revealed to others for fear of losing respectability, as young women also "competed for attention" (Fuh 2009) from their elders and peers. Indeed, Mireille's mother admitted feeling reassured by her daughter's husband-prospecting enterprises, whether or not with the help of kin. The emotional work online prospecting entailed—dealing with one's own feelings of anxiety towards these enterprises being revealed, towards competitors, and towards failure; and managing the feelings of others, both peers and kin—was an increasingly individual affair, as was the work of catching *un gars* or a husband (cf. Archambault 2017, Pype 2019, cf. Johnson-Hanks 2007). At the same time, as the online "economy of abundance" (Illouz 2017) heightened competition, young women felt compelled to learn how to improve their attractiveness even more as they curated their fashionable online exhibitions.

Layers of attractiveness

Mobile phones, android smartphones in particular, increased young women's ability to produce representations (see chapter 1) and ensure that images like the photographs of stars did not only decorate studio and home walls. These images could be now reproduced, edited and circulated on social networks and communications apps, potentially multiplied further and further, generating an "economy of abundance" (Illouz 2017). Indeed, photographs of fashionable young women were present virtually everywhere, from printed images in grandmothers' huts in the village, to the mobile phones of friends, kin and boyfriends. They could be viewed on one's own android phone when stuck in a rain shelter, or glanced at the shoulder of a fellow passenger flipping through her phone on the bus back from the village. These generic images of young female bodies, sometimes depicted as stars in sexy clothes and at other times in *sexy*

mais responsable dresses of wax print or *pagnes*, dominated much of the public and private space both online and offline.

One afternoon I popped by Babi's, a photographer I had befriended, and who worked at a studio near where I lived. I found him and Dora sitting in front of a computer. Dora's android phone was connected to the laptop and the images she had taken of herself appeared on the computer screen. Babi chose a few and opened them in Photoshop. With precision and skill, he altered one image after another, adding photo editing layers onto each image. First, he made a layer that lightened Dora's complexion, particularly her legs. He worked on the contrast of the images next: adding another layer he rendered colours saturated to attract the eye, cutting away any disturbing details. In yet another layer he changed the background so Dora was now at the beach and in a luxurious hotel, against a background which he cropped from a videoclip. "Ha, the image makes me look good," Dora said, admiring his achievements—and her own transformations. She closely observed Babi's operations to later repeat them on her own. While Babi edited the images using professional software, many young women did it themselves between household chores, using less complicated programmes and editing apps on their android phones (figure 35).

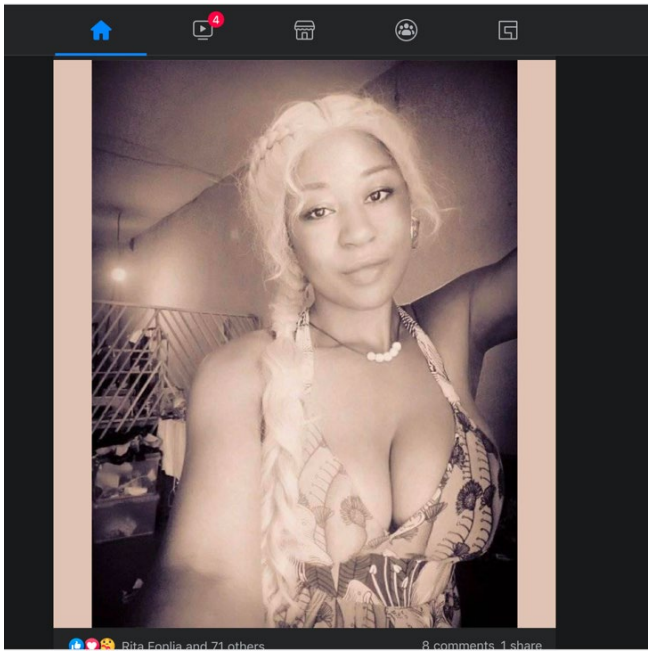


Figure 35. Edited sexy image posted online. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2019).

Whereas here Dora observes Babi to learn how to edit her image well, *filles androides* also learnt from photographers' other techniques of seduction, such as how to pose in a particularly appealing manner.[83] These requests for advice often involved male photographers who, both historically and today, traded in crafting appealing surfaces for women and men.[84] At times young and other women would ask for advice from another trusted man. Such was the case of a few young women with whom I celebrated Women's Day in 2016. As we sat at the table awaiting a meal in a restaurant, I asked Dora if I could get advice on how to seduce or keep a husband or *un gars*. Dora explained aloud that, as I knew she did not have a boyfriend or *un gars* and repeated my question to two young women who were in serious relationships. At her words, the table fell into silence. After few minutes Adelaide proposed to call a friend, Martin, as he would surely deliver the best advice, and other young women readily agreed. "Can you come? We are in St Tropez, you have to give us advice" (*Tu viens, on est à St Tropez, il faut que tu nous donnes des conseils*), she concluded her brief conversation, and in no time Martin was with us, sitting at the table. The competition among young women who concealed from one another the precise details of their successful catches, was not only manifested through the silence at the table at St Tropez, but also in that young women never displayed images of themselves with men with whom they were in more serious relationships and hoped to marry, and the fact that young women sought advice on *comment attraper un mari ou un gars* from young men instead of other women.

Young women not only learned from young men how to edit their images but equally how to use sweet words (*mot doux*) to address the men on the other side of the screen. Another time, we sat side by side with Babi at his studio, monitoring him as he typed "*bonjour mon chéri*. how was your day?" on Facebook to two men he was chatting with on Dora's behalf. He explained to Dora that she must show attentiveness to these men and make them feel she is in love with them. He suggested sending one of the reworked images depicting her at the swimming pool in a swimsuit that highlighted her body. Then Babi's phone rang, and he left to take the call outside the studio. As he had left the chat windows open and the two young men on the other side of the screen kept messaging, Dora turned to me for advice, admitting she did not know how to reply. Learning to increase one's attractiveness thus entailed managing own's own emotions of uncertainty about styles displayed and words used as well as managing the

83. Insofar as the photographer himself embodied the poses of female figures to illustrate women how to pose, studio performances also revealed "queer affordances" (Hendricks 2019).
84. Of the 15 photographic studios I visited during my fieldwork, only two employed women. One of these had one woman and two men working there; in the other there were four male and one female photographers.

emotions of the young men on the other side of the screen. That is, in managing their online displays, young women learnt to consider own and others' emotions as key to intimate relationships, which in turn was a part of beauty work.

The ways in which young women objectified themselves—and were objectified by men—in photographs implied a conscious mastery of visual strategies that added multiple layers to their images: a close-up of a voluminous hairstyle, lightening skin tone using Photoshop, doubling the image to show creative skills and so on. This layering could include a metonymical substitution of a part of the body with an object or a commodity, such as cropping out the head to foreground a fashionable dress or a handbag, as Babi did in reworking Dora's image or as Mirelle displayed on her Facebook profile (figure 35). Like the photographs of their mothers' generation, young women foregrounded the body and physical appearance as well as apparel while editing their images—the displayed images on many profiles would include sexy styles in addition to the voluminous body-covering dresses worn for celebrations and which signalled prosperity and respectability. As the images were edited to be displayed amongst others on Facebook, they were "thickened" with attractiveness (Deger 2016) in order to generate allure (Gell 1988), drawing out the affective aspects of the display value of commodities (cf. Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991).

Few days after Women's Day celebrations I accompanied Mirelle, Dora's *amie intime* (best friend) with whom she spent Women's Day, to her uncle's place. As we reach the uncle's compound and greetings were exchanged, he asked Mirelle how she had celebrated Women's Day. As we took our seats among other guests, Mirelle turned on her android phone and opened up her impressive collection of photographs calling her uncle to look as she was going to provide an answer to his question. Other guests formed a circle around her as Mirelle scrolled through the photographs which met with many congratulatory remarks from her uncle and others. When we came across the image of Dora, Mirelle pointed the phone screen towards Charles, her younger male cousin present among many other guests. Charles scrutinised her appearance silently while Arnoux, another young cousin of Mirelle exclaimed, without ungluing his eyes from the screen: "*Maman! La fille ici est bien!*" (this young woman is "good", connoting marriageability). Mirelle proposed to present Dora to Charles who acquiesced. I found the ease with which Charles agreed to meet Dora perplexing as he had previously told me that choosing a wife is difficult because "you never know what a woman has inside her belly", suggesting that you cannot know a person by their appearance, and highlighting the

importance of fertility for marriage and the uncertainty if a woman would bear a man children (Feldman-Savelsberg et al. 2000, 2005), as well as associations with witchcraft. Yet, even not knowing Dora, and based on the appearance she created in that image, he seemed to consider her a suitable potential marriage candidate, at least one who could be presented to him offline. "This is inexplicable!" (*ça ne s'explique pas*) he said, still enchanted by the image on the screen and, like his cousin, unable to turn away from Dora's appearance. "She is so seductive" (*elle est séduisante jusqu'à*), he concluded. As few days later Charles chatted with Dora, and at her request he bought her extra phone credits, so that she could continue chatting with him.

If young men like Charles fell into the "traps" that young women set through dresses (chapter 2, Gell 1988), they also did so through those women set up through digital photographs. As young women curated their online photographic displays on Facebook, these pages were not only models of their creators, the Gellian hunters and designers of traps, but of their victims, the Gellian prey animals, the young men (chapter 2, Miller 2000:17, Gell 1996, 1998). This happened through modelling of victims' feelings through what was shown and what was hidden. For example, Mirelle was once disappointed with one of her "catches" who went silent for a few weeks. She asked a male photographer friend of hers, who had several times expressed admiration of her styles and looks, to take several images of her at the central Yaoundé park, a venue with an entrance fee where young couples would often venture for romantic escapades. She picked three of these images which showed only her and displayed them on her profile, explaining to me: "looking at these images he will now ask himself who has taken them? Where did she take these dresses from? With whom did she spend time at the park? He will become jealous and call me!" which indeed turned out to be the case. There was a crucial difference between these online catalogues and the offline photographic albums that their male peers, the love brokers, kept at university campuses. On a Facebook wall, young women could actively, creatively and elaborately curate their own fashionable exhibitions, editing their images and thus thickening their attractiveness, modelling their "victims" therein (figure 36).

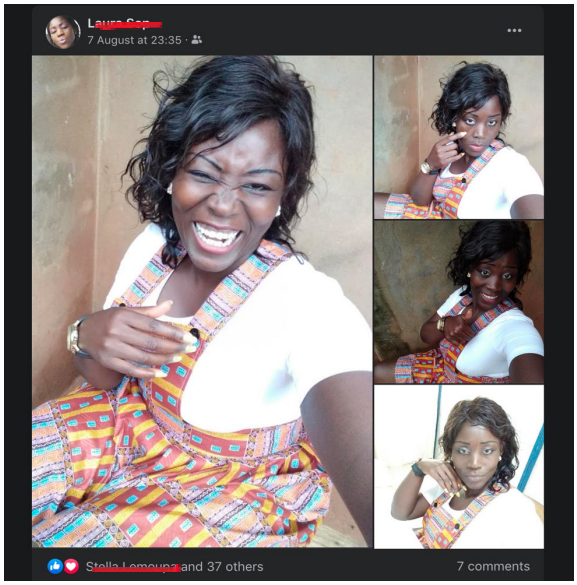


Figure 36. This is another example of photographs displayed that contain silent messages directed at a particular *gars u*sing different expressions: I'm laughing at you, I don't believe you, I'm doing very well, I'm in my place (*je suis a ma place*) (clockwise from left). These messages are meant to evoke particular responses from the *gars* who may, for example, ask himself: where from did she take money for this stylish garment, who paid for her nails and her watch? As this photograph displays a recent summer fashion hit *combinason pantacourt* it equally invites questions from other women. Photo credit: used with the permission of the photographer (2020).

That modelling entailed eliciting specific reactions and feelings from young women's 'catches' which could take different forms. Mirelle often visited her Facebook wall several times a day to consider in advance which images to display and how to edit them. Some images would be displayed on the wall while others sent only *inbox* (ie via chat). In this she admitted to taking into account the comments and likes she received and did not receive. She told me that differently edited images—that is, the different models of victims—would attract different men depending on what one wanted to catch, and that the number of images also mattered.

> If you zoom onto your skirt and cut the surrounding detail you can show not only your style but also make your legs stand out, young men immediately will feel attracted … but if you add this background [showing one of a hotel interior] it looks like you are working here, this could attract a more serious man, he will not be immediately attracted for sex but will feel this woman is serious … you can also send *inbox* an image at the swimming pool [pointing to another image] to zoom onto the breasts and belly and legs and this will seduce any men you want or you can display them on your profile if you want to make *un gars* feel jealous …. Look if you send many images to a man where you look sexy day by day he will feel wanted, this does not mean that you love him but you try to make him feel like you are in love with him. … This can work

> for a serious man if you have already talked to him before but should be not sent too soon except if you are not looking for a serious relationship.

Mirelle also incorporated other images into her Facebook profile: photographs of celebrities, announcement of job offers, religious memes and statements about intimate relationships. The latter, especially, she explained, was a subject of her prior evaluation in terms of what it would announce about her. “For example, I would show this meme [about intimacy] to make others feel jealous. It looks as if I am in a relationship if I post it so others won’t write to me”. She admitted she was not always successful in what she posted; once, she didn’t receive a single comment on an image and this made her withdraw it immediately and revaluate her style. In doing so, Mirelle aimed to resolve the problem inherent to all websites, that is, a lack of control over the response of its audience (Miller 2000:16), which entailed an elicitation and curation of one’s own and others’ feelings in a visual and textual way.

Recall how Charles remained stuck to the mobile phone screen, looking at a photo of Dora. The reproduction—or the repetition and interchangeability that the economy of abundance afforded—rehearsed a particular structure of feeling, enchantment or allure, that held him in a sensory grip (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1937], Thrift 2008, cf. IIlouz 2017). Through viewing the display or receiving a photograph *inbox*—not only of this particular photograph but of all the similar others that saturate Facebook and other social networks—he was engaged in imaginary explorations that solicited his feelings towards the possibility of marriage for romantic love, of individual partner choice in a context where kin continue to be involved in marriage negotiations. Charles admitted that the workings of the display were beyond his comprehension; it was “inexplicable”; he was enchanted by it, revealing how embodied knowledge defies discourse. Instead of trying to rationalise his emotions, he indulged in being compelled by them (cf. Illouz 2017), revealing the working of aesthetic capitalism insofar as it holds one in a sensory grip (Thrift 2008). Often, as young men became enchanted, they met young women’s demands, to send them phone and internet credit or, if wealthy, to wire substantial sums from abroad. In doing so they resembled the consumers who feel, in Illouz’s terms, “compelled to buy and use advertising products” not, as she argues, “even though they see through them” (2017:223), but as they indulged in *not* seeing, or not wanting to see, through them (cf. Tonda 2005).

Note the ways in which digital photographs complicate understandings of ideologies of emotional attachment. Among young women's mothers' generation, the emotional and material aspect of intimate relations were co-constitutive and manifested through photographs exchanged as material objects. In their online pursuits, their daughters, the *filles androides,* merely displayed their photographs. However, this lack of actual gifting of the material photograph was not considered in terms of doing away with the material and emotional co-constitution of intimate relationships (Thomas and Cole 2009, Cole 2006). When young men accepted such displays of photographs as a sign of seriousness and commitment, it was because of the feelings, independently of their material form, that photographs generated (Thomas and Cole 2009, Cole 2006). As photographs modelled their victims, young men and women knew that particular person was an object of a particular photograph displayed, and it was this intention of the gift that mattered (Piot 1999).

In this way, the editing and multiplication of digital imagery figuring female bodies and the enchanting effects it achieves resonate with the wider visual regimes in which scholars argue postcolonial power operates (Ndjio 2005, Mbembe 2001, Tonda 2005).[85] Writing about presidential effigies that decorate the insides and outsides of urban and rural locales in varied forms, whether photographs, almanacks or political textiles, Ndjio relates the virtual omnipresence of such doubles to the real absence of the ruler from the country(2005:274).[86] These representations, Ndjio suggests, work to collapse the distinction between the fact and artefact, President Biya's illusionary presence and his real absence from the country most of the year (ibid). Indeed, the efficacy of these effigies stems precisely from blurring the boundaries between subject and object (Latour 2010). This is similar to how young women's generic photographs posted online—advertisements—worked. Their virtual presence and excessive display, as Ndjio points out, was particularly desired in order to touch the minds of others (ibid). I suggest, however that such images did not touch only the mind as Ndjio argues, but rather the embodied mind of the viewer. These images, displayed across social networks, did not simply abolish the distinction between what is and what might be nowhere near, as Ndjio suggests is at stake for presidential effigies (ibid). Instead the photographs young women displayed and circulated perpetuated or maintained distinctions between what is and what could

85. Images of female bodies, like the ruler's body, saturate public and private space: the effigies of young women's naked bodies or those of stars like Beyoncé are the only ones displayed and sold alongside those of the president and religious figures such as the Virgin Mary on avenue Kennedy in central Yaoundé and Douala's central bridge.
86. President Biya is known to spend at times half of the year abroad, most often at the Hotel Continental in Switzerland.

be, rehearsing the particular structure of feeling that generates enchantment and which, in turn, creates a possibility for marriage from romantic love to be entertained and to be hoped for.

Love burnout

Later that evening, at Mirelle's uncle's home, another cousin, Ghiselain, laughed at Charles, calling him naïve because the women to whom he sent credits would never meet him. This, he explained, was how *filles androides* got by. Ghiselain alluded here to the title of a recent local film, *Filles Androides,* which had as a major theme how attractive women rip off men. He recounted the story of a friend who had met a young woman he had previously chatted with on Facebook and only then realised that the woman was ugly. It was only the image that made her look good, he laughed. Charles responded that if a young woman displayed herself so, and succeeded in looking attractive despite her meagre means, it was a sign of her industriousness: she must have navigated complex networks to accumulate the social and economic means (both persons and things) and made a lot of "calculations" to be able to embellish her body, have a new dress and be present in the place where the photograph was made. When I remarked that the background could have been photoshopped, Charles argued: "that is even better, she must either be able to do it"—implying she was computer literate and had certain skills—"or know someone who can make it for her!"—implying she had a social network. "They are young and beautiful but what will they eat tomorrow?" Charles concluded, referring to the difficulties of everyday life in the postcolony for young men and women alike: "*elle se débrouille, elle va faire comment*?"

Indeed, the majority of young men I interviewed stated a preference for fashionable urban girls, including those who wore sexy styles. Ghiselain, who was in his mid-twenties, explained to me what kind of woman he would like to marry and stressed the importance of visual attractiveness and knowledge of "fashions": "A woman who works well and follows fashions, women from the villages (*villageoise*) work hard but don't dress well while women from the city (*femmes de ville*) dress very well and do *nyanga* (chapter 1)—this also shows work … but they can be expensive". While often it was difficult to choose their own wives given the involvement of the elders in marriage negotiations, and while young men differed in their opinions of young women and their styles, many said that fashionable young women were their ideal candidates.

Digital online displays might not correspond to the ways in which young women displayed themselves in everyday life, but whether these moments "at their best" (Buggenhagen 2014) were "real" or "fake" was not a primary concern for the women who produce these images, nor for the men they attempted to seduce. Instead the representations of young women saturating the digital sphere generated sensory effects and were appreciated in terms of their industriousness and skills, which in turn spoke of their social networks: their wealth in things revealed their wealth in people (Guyer 1993, cf. Piot 1999). Besides signifying monetary investment, such appearances indexed and materialised knowledge of fashion (chapter 2) and *posters* (chapter 3) which was seen as desirable in women by many young men. If some valued and desired such representations, it was because conceptions of female entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship in general, are praised among Bamiléké for women and men alike (Warnier 1993). The economic role of women—their economic autonomy—was valued by young men, even if it was not encouraged by the church and state discourses and practices. Thus, the images were not taken as testimony of the real life these young women led, but as testimony of the future, indexing their skills and potential.

On the one hand, young women objectified themselves in terms of male desire and reproduced the images of women circulating in global and local culture, turning their bodies female and visually commodifying them as objects for advertising. Insofar as capitalism commodifies female bodies for male (visual and other) consumption (cf. Tonda 2005, see chapter 2), young women fed into these objectifications as, for example, they replaced parts of their own bodies with commodities in their Facebook profile images, or when men advised them how to best depict themselves to lure a man. As such the digital images reinforced structures of patriarchy and adjacent ideologies of gender embedded in church and the state (Walker-Said 2015, 2016, Ndjio 2013, Awondo 2016). Insofar as such ideologies also confined women to the household, young women often reworked their images not only from their homes but also from their beds and in between their daily tasks and duties.

On the other hand, objectifying themselves through images in terms of male desire was a conscious strategy on the part of young women. In order to achieve the most convincing self-objectification, they purposefully observed men and learned their skills. They practiced editing skills and tried to create the most appealing and creative representations of their bodies. These creative representations were valued not only as representing visual and creative skills but also, as Charles concluded, skills to get by. In doing so, the representations of entrepreneurial women

that these images materialised unsettled as much as fed patriarchal and largely colonial structures and discourses—wherein the economic and public sphere was construed as male, while the female domain was confined to privacy, and their economic role to reproduction—defying such classifications (cf. Butler 1990, Mahmood 2005).

Instead these practices spoke to valuing the economic autonomy of women, echoing pre-colonial ideologies of gender parallelism (Goheen 1996, Amadioume 1987) rather than church and state discourses that saw women as a "*gardienne du foyer, de son mari et ses enfants*" (see introduction). The digital representations enabled young women not only to show themselves to be industrious and economically successful but, at times, to actually become economically successful, as when the images enabled young women to channel economic resources from men towards themselves (chapter 2), or to receive job offers or better positions (chapter 3) and gather substantial social and economic resources. But if young women's production of dreams of love through images enabled them to obtain benefits, this required sustained work—recall how young women felt compelled to constantly improve their skills—at considerable cost, emotional and otherwise. For example, one had to hide one's own enterprises from peers and kin, leading to feelings of fear about being uncovered, which also prevented others from trying to learn their skills.

The secrecy and competition that permeated digital husband-catching tells us something about young women's ideas of love and marriage. While running their online enterprises, these young women both embraced ideas of romantic love and marriage as a union of two individuals, and of courtship and marriage as more akin to a business or an enterprise, necessitating skills, including skilfully layering attractiveness, but also money, time and other resources (cf. Pype 2018). Thus, young women accumulated capital by investing the resources they gathered from men into new clothes and appearances to lure new men through the new images they posted online. As Mirelle once explained, "for us Bamiléké, marriage is an enterprise".

Thus, on the one hand, young women would whistle popular songs telling stories about broken hearts, betrayal, a desire for romantic love, a male provider, monogamy and fidelity (cf. Hunter 2010, Cole 2006). They would go to great lengths to debate the morality of the heroine of a reverentially watched Mexican telenovela, *Triomphe d'amour*, and whistle Mani Bella's *Pala Pala* about being crazy in love. Thus, romantic love, a husband chosen and retained out of love and physical attraction, was something that young women wanted and worked towards. On the

other hand, even while they were working on their images, the emotional and other work involved, and the effects achieved, also spoke otherwise: young women were pragmatic (competitive and rational) in their choices of how to go about seducing a man, and catching *un gars* or a husband was certainly tiring work. Indeed young women complained that a solitary search for a husband was difficult and remarked on how it was easier for their mothers who had help from their kin. To be sure young women at times had such help too, as Mirelle did in the vignette that opened the chapter, but most agreed that today it was both rare and less effective because the best catches were far away, out of the reach of kin. The online fashion displays of young women as they competed with one another for the best catch articulated intimacy as both a romantic union and as a market enterprise (cf. Illouz 2012, Zelizer 2005), challenging the easy distinctions between private and public, male and female, home and the market, in church and state discourses that popular culture in Cameroon obstinately continues to circulate (Fuh 2009). For young women, intimate relations on the digital marriage market were most often run as individual enterprises, often at night, via their android phones, from their beds (cf. Johnson-Hanks 2007).

This form of entrepreneurship intimately tied together work and the self in the body (Foucault 1980, Freeman 2014). Emotions and affects were central to that work, speaking to the condition Illouz calls aesthetic capitalism (2007, 2017). Doing all this work on their own was itself a source of uncertainty and anxiety, as young women constantly asked themselves *comment attraper un gars ou un mari?* Recall, moreover, how at the beginning of this chapter Mirelle complained about being burdened by having to make an individual decision about her choice of partner, not only because she felt the means of generating knowledge about candidates provided by mothers and grandmothers were lost but because it was an exhausting enterprise. Young women were uncertain if they would succeed and were increasingly anxious about their skills as "economies of abundance" displayed the skills of others. They worried their less respectable pursuits might be discovered and today's best (female) friends could tomorrow be revealed as enemies. Constantly monitoring new fashions and skills was tiring, as was finding new ways to sneak out of the house and avoid being seen by members of the village in Yaoundé, coming up with excuses to buy new textiles or explain why one was in a place one should not be seen in last night. *Kongossa* (rumour) travelled fast and one could receive a phone call from a member of kin living far away the very next day.

Enterprising love in particular, and intimacy in general, was tiring. "*Fatiguée j'ai arrêté*", said Mirelle, opening her arms wide in a gesture of powerlessness and despair, submitting, against her own desire perhaps, to the idea that she might end up not marrying for love. While she managed to get some monetary and other benefits through the multiple relationships she engaged in via Facebook (at times without ever meeting the men), none of these proved to be "serious". The photograph her aunt took to Douala was never shown to the candidate, who had meanwhile "fallen to the bush" and whose online Facebook profile Mirelle was unable to find. The aunt halted negotiations without further explanation and Mirelle's own Facebook relationships bore no fruit, leaving her with a question: "*Je vais me marier un jour?*" To produce love under contemporary Cameroonian conditions of ongoing economic and political decay and intense transnational migration was exhausting emotional work that tired out young women and could lead to a love burnout, as Mirelle's powerlessness revealed. The work invested in, and the tiredness resulting from, the incessant demands of digital intimacy made many young women question the value of marriage generally, and love marriage in particular. By doing so, the work invested in these enterprises could at times limit what it was meant to produce, namely hope. While their mothers' generation had rejected "traditional" marriage (Goheen 1996), the young women were led to delay marriage and questioned whether marriage would happen at all.

Conclusion

This chapter examined how young women mobilise digital photography to fashion intimate relationships. The first section examined how young women go about catching husbands offline. I have shown that while such ways are limited they are often collective enterprises mediated by kin. While the contemporary ways of using printed images to mediate intimate encounters resonate with those of the past, young women reckon that the best candidates are often abroad and in order to reach them they have to resort to digital means. Young women do not see these offline and online enterprises as opposed (cf. Archambault 2017) but as complementary means of ensuring their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). The emotional work (Hochschild 2003 [1983]) involved in offline husband-catching can be collective, shared with kin.

The second section examined how young women go about catching a *gars*, or a husband, online. Whereas digital means offer young women new and more direct ways to approach men, allowing them to maintain respectability, digital display through its interchangeability and repetitiveness also increases competition among young women (cf. Illouz 2007). Online pursuit renders young women insecure about their skills and appearance, and about the outcomes of their enterprises. As competition grows and as young women aim to minimise the risk of losing respectability, they resort to secrecy, thus managing the emotional work they once shared with kin on their own (Hochschild 2012 [1983]).

The third section considered the images young women circulate online. While women feel they lack knowledge of how to catch a suitable husband or *un gars* because they have no kin nearby, they observe what their male peers—deemed expert at photography—do with images and imitate them. This consists of editing images in such a way s to heighten their attractiveness, despite their own feelings of insecurity about it. As such, they learn to create images of romantic love and to market themselves as objects of that love. Where young men are aware that this marketing is a way that young women get by, they are also aware that this implies skilful navigation of economic and other resources. As such, these displays, and the skill and resourcefulness inherent within them, gain the admiration of young men who recognise women as industrious (Warnier 2007, Amadioume 1987).

The final section examined the understandings of love that emerge as young women manage their husband-catching enterprises online. It showed that the labour and skills required for these enterprises make women into entrepreneurs of love. As young women work to produce love as an emotion in their male targets, they unsettle gendered binaries of private and public, intimacy and the market, emotions and rationalisation (cf. Illouz 2017, 2007). Instead their enterprises reveal the workings of an aesthetic capitalism, wherein such calculations and emotions entwine; leading to exhaustion and, ultimately, love burnout.

Where this thesis argues that visual self-fashioning is a set of skills, this chapter illustrated this with regard to digital editing skills. Furthering the thesis argument that beauty work generates sensory effects, this chapter has shown the limits of such effects, related to the intensive emotional work (Hochschild 2012 [1983]) their production involves. Answering the main thesis question what visual self-fashioning does and affords women to do, this chapter has shown how beauty work affords young women to manifest themselves as industrious (Warnier

2007, Amadioume 1987) in the eyes of their kin as well as of the young men they seek to attract.



Figure 37. Young woman with her own child and a cousin. The children are being photographed against a background of Dubai skyscrapers during the end-of-year festive season in a makeshift photographic studio. Such studios mushroom across Yaoundé at this time of year and are put up and dismantled overnight. Photo credit: Ewa Majczak (2016)

CONCLUSION

It is December 2018. I'm awaiting a Skype call with Adelaide; this has become our regular means of catching up. As she logs on and I see her blurred image appear I ask how she has been for the last months. "There is a war in the country" are her first words, and are followed by silence. She refers not only to the ongoing struggle with the Boko Haram that has ravaged the north of Cameroon since 2013. She also has in mind the recent resurgence of the conflict in the Anglophone region of the country, dormant since independence, which took a particularly violent turn in December 2017. She, like all the young women in this thesis, is from a village located just a few kilometres from where the armed struggle between civilians and the government began. She continues talking, about floods of refugees, burnt villages and

fear. Similar events are remembered from the "time of troubles"—the events around Cameroon's independence, when conditions resembling civil war swept over Grassfields (Deltombe, Domergue and Tatsitsa 2011). Although young women like Adelaide did not witness those events, the memories of that period are alive as their mothers and grandmothers narrate their fear (Feldman-Savelsberg and Ndonko 2000).

Adelaide changes the subject to work and says with disappointment that she still does not have proper employment. She relates her situation to the September 2018 elections. The Cameroonian president, Paul Biya, or, as she calls him, "our father", who has ruled for 37 years, was re-elected for the another seven-year term. "What did you think would happen?" she asks me rhetorically "A chief dies on his throne". Change and jobs, ideas that were part of his plan for youth, Adelaide laughs ironically, have been postponed to 2035.[87] We change topics again. I figure out by reading between the lines that her "Canadian number one choice" has still not returned to Cameroon despite making promises and calling her, she emphasises, every other day. She thinks it is time for her to marry soon. As our conversation continues, she is careful not to reveal too many details when I ask about others. After a while her tone changes and she says with urgency: "Excuse me, I have to hang up now as I'm getting my hairstyle made". Rehearsing a familiar refrain, I learnt in the field, I respond: "Always beautiful and young" and she follows with the reminder "But with no job and no husband. But I hope!" Our conversation ends.

I started this thesis by asking why young Bamiléké women like Adelaide who live in precarious conditions, and are disillusioned with formal paths of upward mobility such as education and employment, invest in beauty, fashion and photography to the extent that they do. Driven by this question, the ethnographic material presented in the preceding chapters examined how young women fashion their selves and social relations visually, against the context of post-Cold War trade and media liberalisation in Cameroon (Konings 2011, Röschenthaler 2016, Röschenthaler and Socpa 2017). The discussion moved beyond the usual examination of consumption in semiotic terms and thus beyond an examination of imitation as an index of imaginations, dreams and aspirations (Weiss 1999, Newell 2012, Gondola 1999, Friedman 1994, cf. Cole 2010). Such approaches while illuminating global economic and power relations do not inquire into how imitation is understood and evaluated by social actors themselves.

87. She refers here to Biya's development plan for Cameroon, "Emergence 2035".

Instead, this ethnography revealed how visual self-fashioning is conceived of and evaluated in terms of set of visual skills and embodied knowledge that generate sensory effects: what this thesis calls “beauty work”.

From this perspective this thesis has made three arguments about young women’s investments in beauty, dress and photographs.

First, this thesis has argued, self-fashioning when seen through the lens of visual skills, embodied knowledge and practice, amounts to beauty work (cf. Miller 1987, Foster 2008), and enables young women to transform their selves and social relations across gender and generations and other domains of social life. Through the work required to produce beauty, and through the work that beauty does, young women form reputations, gain wealth in followers and wealth in men (Guyer and Belinga 1995). Thus, this thesis has suggested, the lengths to which young women go in their self-fashioning endeavours should not only be seen as an index of their desires and aspirations in a context of neoliberalism and globalisation (cf. Ferguson 1999, 2006, cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2001, cf. Weiss 1999, cf. Newell 2012, cf. Gondola 1999, cf Friedman 1994) but in terms of actual transformation (Fuh 2009, Cole 2010), and as part and parcel of their “being-in-becoming” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012), connected to notions of personhood (Guyer 1993, 1996, Guyer and Belinga 1996, Nyamnjoh 2002, Cole 2006).

Second, this thesis has suggested, while beauty work allows young women to alter their social positions and relations across gender and generation, this both unsettles and reinforces existing gender and generational norms embedded in the discourses of Cameroonian state and church. That is, through beauty work, young women craft their bodies as objects for display, reiterating the visual regimes of aesthetic capitalism, as well as of the Cameroonian state, which centre on the commodification of female body (Tonda 2005, Illouz 2017). But, in a context where many paths of upward social mobility are compromised, the skilful crafting of surfaces allows young women to manifest themselves as industrious and achieve desired ends. Thus, if young women’s practices resonate with wider regimes of immaterial value creation under capitalism and regimes of state power, these are not only constitutive of female aesthetic subjectivities but also transformative for young women i.e. not reducible to the wider power regimes that underpin them (Butler 1997).

Third, as young women keep investing in beauty work despite their failures, and amidst the uncertainties and insecurities of the postcolony, beauty work generates hope that the best is still to come: that ways out of waithood are possible. Hope, as a temporal reorientation of embodied knowledge (cf. Miyazaki 2006), emerges through young women's self-fashioning practices, I have argued, as performative and contingent on "newness", that is, the temporality of commodity consumption itself (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1939]). Thus, the investments and persistence in young women's self-fashioning endeavours should be seen as ensuring their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). In other words as hopeful ways out of the waithood within which young *filles androides* are stuck (Honwana 2012).

Fabricating femininities

The first chapter, "Making beauty", asked how women fashion their selves and social relations visually across generations. The chapter started with an examination of the beauty practices of young women's grandmothers to show how the display of beautified female bodies pertains to a set of embodied knowledge and skills: a performative capacity (Ferguson 1999, Taussig 1992) learnt through socialisation and aimed at achieving sensory effects for the self and others, generating attraction (Groes Green 2013, Tamale 2005, Mustafa 2006). In that older generation, female bodies literally materialised the family's wealth on the surface of the skin through, for example, scarification that spoke of wealth and rank (Ongoum 1987). The display of female bodies beautified in this way engaged an "aesthetics of prestige" that highlighted both volume and sheen (Rowlands 1994). The presence of church missions and later state-building around independence (1960s) fostered other conceptions of female bodily display underpinned by notions of cleanness and morality and individual notions of personhood (Burke 1996, Thomas 2005). A temperate use of cosmetic products was encouraged, where "natural" makeup was meant to engage an "aesthetics of respectability", constructing notions of "natural Cameroonian beauty" (Mougoué 2019) and underpinned by notions of imitation as mere reproduction rather than skilful reproduction as in crafts. *Romans photos* equally encouraged beautifying one's body as embodied knowledge through the glossy images they circulated (cf. Mougoué 2019). If "aesthetics of prestige" and "aesthetics of respectability" continue to inform young women's self-fashioning today, the liberalisation of the media and influx of cheap commodities from China around the turn of the millennium further enhanced the possibility of copying feminine styles: young women can now author their visual

representations using the cameras of their mobile phones. The chapter argued that while the means and ways of doing *nyanga* have changed through generations, today young women and their kin are compelled to generate allure themselves instead of relying on their potential husbands and their kin to provide them the means to do so. This in turn resonates with the wider economic and social predicament of ongoing unemployment that compromises the bridewealth payments to which *nyanga* pertained. By tracing how beauty came to be considered as work requiring embodied skills, this chapter historicised the thesis's main argument that beauty work entails visual skills and embodied knowledge that generate sensory effects (cf. Miller 1987, Foster 2008).

The second chapter, "Fashioning seductiveness", focused on how young women fashion seductiveness through dress styles. The chapter started with an examination of the government's DVD-VCD (2014) campaign by inscribing it in a longer trajectory of colonial and postcolonial obsessions with the naked female body (Coly 2015), and showing how it has aimed to regulate female sexual agency in the public space. In particular, female reproductive sexuality and motherhood indexed through dressed and covered bodies is framed as legitimate and encouraged at the expense of pleasure (Spronk 2014) which is now discursively confined to its commodified form (Tonda 2005, Bernault 2005). Conversely, uncovered and undressed bodies are associated with connotations of immorality and prostitution (Thomas 2005, White 1999, Hodgson and McCurdy 2005), rehearsing the dictates of church, market and state (Tonda 2005). If the first chapter highlighted how *nyanga* came to be valued as a skill, this chapter discussed risks associated with performing *nyanga* today. Young women refrain from wearing sexy styles, despite its pleasures, and in view of "respecting themselves" restrict "sexy" to home or compound and night-time pursuits. As such dress and sexual agency exercised therein become a matter of self-management converging with notions of sexuality promulgated by the campaign, notably as the modern form of power (cf Foucault 1988). Yet such overt displays of bodies in sexy also engage in "theatrics of attraction", and young women are well aware that this is a way of seducing men. Thus, young women take risks and venture in sexy into public space to engage men's desires, but also use other dress styles to disengage men's desires and cultivate their own, at home and elsewhere. They thereby articulate the erotic as pleasure outside the sexual act (Lorde 1993 [1987]), defying the conception of female sexuality articulated by the campaign. This chapter showed—in support of this thesis's argument that beauty work is a set of skills that generates sensory effects—that dress generates allure as a technology of (dis)enchantment (cf. Gell 1988), that is, as an embodied skill and knowledge of

(dis)enchanting the other and the self. Answering the main thesis question about what investments in beauty, dress and photographs afford young women to do, this chapter argued that these allow young women to navigate and accumulate "wealth in men" (Guyer and Belinga 1995).

The third chapter, "Fashioning respectability", turned to the other side of the campaign, asking how young women fashion respectability through dress. The chapter started by describing the discourses about respectable womanhood as they circulate in today's Cameroon to show how respect for women is largely linked to procreation and marriage, which are in turn unavailable to young women in waithood (Honwana 2012). Trying to reconcile the desire to appear respectable through consumption of dress with the pleasure of the "theatrics of attraction" of *nyanga*, young women invest their skills to craft unique styles (Sylvanus 2013). In doing so they articulate alternatives to bourgeois domestic notions of respectability which rely on skill in crafting alluring surfaces (ibid). While developing fashion competence—partaking in beauty work—relies on informal and formal socialisation (Craik 1994, cf. Hansen 2004), post-Cold War market and media liberalisation has fostered a wider engagement in dressing in terms of skills and knowledge through available garments and items. Thus, young women spend prolonged periods of time on their phones searching for inspiration to develop complex and unique styles, acquiring and updating their expert skills and knowledge, and devising strategies as to where to show which model and when. Crucially they also readily share their styles with others, giving advice, but mostly making and circulating images using the cameras of their android phones. This is done to extend their own style fame (Miller 2005, Munn 1988) and, ideally, indebt others by meeting their needs (Piot 1999) for inspiration and guidance in fashioning allure. Furthering this thesis's argument that beauty work generates sensory effects, this chapter showed how such circulation extends the enchantment or allure that making and wearing garments entails (cf. Benjamin 1992 [1937]). In doing so—and answering the main thesis question of what investments in beauty do and afford young women to do—this chapter showed how the circulation of dresses creates a respectable reputation as a fashionista, and allows young women to convert their skills and knowledge into wealth in followers building relationships and networks around shared sensibilities (cf. Guyer and Belinga 1995, cf. Meyer 2010, Ahmed 2004).

The fourth chapter, "Fashioning hope", followed embellished and fashionably dressed young women as they ventured to photographic studios to "get their dresses photographed". This

chapter asked why young women persist in their investments despite the failures they experience. Contributing to the argument that through visual self-fashioning young women train their bodies into display value of commodities (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991), it showed how young women do so through another skill of beauty work, namely posing—the so-called *poster* skill—and how female aesthetic subjectivities are thereby made (Butler 1990, 1997, Warnier 2007). The chapter started by examining the discourses about women and photography in contemporary Cameroon through a historical lens, drawing out how the entanglement between dress and photographs—matters of crafted surfaces—inform the popular gendered claim that "women love photographs" (cf. Wendl 2001). The particular way in which the time and space of the studio conjures the actual and the possible, engaging the "as if", is what attracts young women (even the owners of android phones) in particular, and other urbanites in general, to studios (cf. Behrend 2017, Strassler 2012, Pinney 1997). This conjuring is sedimented in the body, for photographic performances allow young women to train in the techniques of posing (Mauss 1973 [1935]). Such techniques can then be used to enhance their presence and generate allure at an event, life cycle ceremony, or a stroll in a *quartier* or on the university campus. They rely on the commodification of the body, and the visual commodification of the female body in particular, speaking directly to arguments about the centrality of the female body not only for postcolonial power (Tonda 2005) but for aesthetic capitalism at large (Illouz 2017). Yet, such practices develop under the eye of a male photographer and are framed in terms of skills. The chapter showed how posing in particular, and beauty work in general, feeds off patriarchal visual regimes of power whilst defying such regimes by valuing women's own skills and industriousness. At the same time, young women know that their photographic performances as stars are only temporary enterprises, and that the "as if" is not close at hand. What these performances procure is, as young women state, entertainment. Such performances then, following Turner (1982), hold young women in-between and in doing so allow them to redirect their embodied knowledge towards the "not-yet" (cf. Miyazaki 2004). Thus, furthering the thesis's argument that beauty work consists of skills and embodied knowledge generating sensory effects, the chapter argued that photographic performances generate hope, allowing young women to feel that, as the studio advertisement has it, "the best is still to come". That is, what beauty work affords young women is an affective moment of hope.

The fifth chapter, "Entrepreneurs of love", brought together themes related to beauty work as a set of visual and embodied skills, of making aesthetic subjectivities, and embodying hope. The chapter asked how young women mobilise online photography to fabricate intimacy (cf

Archambault 2017, cf. Pype 2019, cf. Johnson-Hanks 2007), starting with showing how catching a husband or a *gars* offline is mediated by kin and printed photographs. But, as often the best candidates are abroad and out of the reach of kin, young women resort to catching a man online, using their android phones, most often on Facebook at the time of my fieldwork. Such individual husband-catching enterprises do not replace but rather supplement collective husband-catching aided by kin (cf. Archambault 2017) as young women aim to increase their wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017). Through such display, young women search for suitable marriage candidates by displaying fashionable styles, but this online means of forging intimacy—which exposes the repetitiveness and interchangeability of both images and styles—concurrently increases anxiety about their own styles, compelling them to improve their image-editing skills (cf. Illouz 2017). Thus, they sit with their male friends at photographic studios and learn how best to objectify their own bodies, through the expert male gaze, copying the photographers' skills of "layering attractiveness" (cf. Deger 2016) and learning "sweet words" to communicate with prospective catches. In doing so they position emotions, and their management, as key to the success of their intimate enterprises. If this apprenticeship entails a visual commodification of emotion, and of inciting sensory reception in viewers, it also solicits an appreciation for young women's skill in getting by. Answering this thesis's main question about what beauty work does, and what it affords women to do, this chapter illustrated how the evaluations of such images show what is admired is young women's skill and how it speaks to their industriousness. But the visual production of emotions is also emotional work (Hochschild 2012 [1983]). The difference between offline kin-mediated enterprises and those online, largely run at home at night while in bed, is that young women bear the burden of the latter on their own. The individual management of emotions that husband-catching in general requires, and the wider "labour of love" more generally, is exhausting for young women and can lead to love burnout. This in turn furthers the thesis's arguments about beauty work achieving sensory effects, for it points to its limits, and thus the limits of hope.

Together, the above chapters illustrated how beauty work—both the work necessary to produce beauty and the work that beauty does—fashions women as aesthetic subjectivities and open paths to upward social mobility as young women skilfully craft the surfaces of their bodies and the extensions of those bodies—dresses and photographs—on their multiple social skins (Turner 1980).

Beauty work

Building on the literature that considers consumption in relation to personhood (Rowlands 1994, Nyamnjoh 2002, Cole 2010), this thesis moves beyond the focus, dominant in the literature, of analysing consumption as imitation, indexing imaginations, dreams or aspirations (Weiss 1999, Friedman 1994, Gondola 1989, Newell 2012, Fergsuon 2006) in a context of globalisation and neoliberalism. Instead I have inquired how imitation is understood by social actors themselves and examined it as skills and embodied knowledge, skills and practice (Benjamin 1992 [1939], Taussig 1992, Ferguson 1999) underpinned by notions of personhood (Guyer 1995). In the foregoing pages, we have seen that, for example, imitation—when young women emulate a *poster* of a star during a photographic performance—is evaluated as a skill or technique (chapter 3). Similarly, knowledge of how to dress like Charlotte Dipanda is conceived of as "fashion competence" (cf. Hansen 2005). From this perspective of skills and embodied knowledge, investments in beauty, fashion and photographs amount to beauty work and are valued by peers and kin alike (cf. Miller 1995, Foster 2008) revealing women in terms of skills and industriousness. As such, women's beautified bodies speak also of continuity between generations (cf. Cole 2010): parents can be proud of their daughters' skills and know these beautified bodies, today as in the past, can increase the brideprice.

Furthermore, images in which young women pose as stars are not necessarily read as reflecting aspirations of becoming a star—although some women might indeed wish it, they are very careful about what such an aspiration would imply. Rather, there is an understanding that if a young woman stuck in "waithood" successfully fashions herself as a star, she has had to pull together considerable social and economic resources to have dresses and photographs made in the first place. Recall how young men judge a young woman in terms of her skill at imitating, the dresses she buys or borrows, the *posters* she learns, how she navigates social networks to obtain money for a photographic print, and the skills she possesses—or someone she knew possesses—to edit a digital image. That is, the skills demonstrated by beauty work manifest young women as industrious and able to get by in the challenging conditions of the Cameroonian postcolony (Mbembe 2001) (chapter 4 and 5). In making the argument about beauty work being valued in terms of skills, creativity and embodied knowledge I have built on arguments about "tradition of inventions" and "wealth in people" pertaining to the *longue durée* for the region (Guyer 1993, Guyer and Belinga 1996). In arguing how this in turn affords

perceptions of industriousness which in itself is promoted and valued, I have built in particular on arguments made for the Grassfields region specifically (Warnier 1993, 2007, denOuden 1987), and by African feminists in general (Amadiume 1987, Oyewumi 1997).

Because visual self-fashioning is also read in terms of young women's skills, capacities, economic means and social networks, it comes with certain risks, and can raise suspicion as to where a young woman has gathered the means and acquired such knowledge. This evokes associations with prostitution and engagement with undesirable sectarian networks of wealthy men as well as witchcraft (Geschiere 2013). Thus, young women, through beauty work, negotiate moral forms of personhood, especially as they seek to be seen as respected and to distance themselves from accusations of being a prostitute, which can easily throw moral respectability into disarray. That is, for example, a young woman wearing sexy style and a lot of makeup—showing off skills and wealth—might equally compromise that claim to respect because of the association of such styles and makeup with prostitution. If such predicaments point to multiplicity and contradiction as characteristic of the post-Cold war Cameroon (Mbembe 2001), they also imply that young women navigate respectability and sexuality not as two separate strategies at different stages in their lives but as two aspects of the same strategy, fraught with risks from the start (cf. Cole 2010, Gilbert 2014).

But, if beauty work requires skills and competences and allows young women to manifest industriousness, it also generates sensory effects. The ways in which beauty work achieves this is reminiscent, I have suggested, of Gell's "technologies of enchantment" (1988): skills are embedded in the material production of aesthetic forms such as dress and photographs and implicate the sensorium to achieve desired effects through performance (Austin 1975 [1962], chapter 2). When young women create a resemblance to celebrities and stars through their poses, manners and looks, the resemblances and likenesses produced in these performances—while emerging from learnt bodily knowledge and calculated visual skills—generate visual pleasure and invite imaginary explorations that hold the self and others in a sensory grip (cf. Thrift 2008). Furthermore, as young women circulate the images digitally or in print, their dresses and images, such sensory effects are enhanced and reproduced. In doing so, they convert things, skills and knowledge into the reputation of being a fashionista and accumulate wealth in followers and wealth in men through the circulation of objects (cf. Munn 1986, Guyer and Belinga 1995). That is, through distribution they establish their own networks around shared "aesthetic sensibilities" (Meyer 2010) or buy into those of others. Thus, I have shown

how the importance of sharing and distribution within consumer cultures fuelled by globalisation and neoliberalism is underpinned by an "economy of desire" (Piot 1999).

As such, this thesis has contributed to the analysis of consumption in Africa which has mainly focused on young men and been analysed in semiotic terms (i.e. imitation equals imagination, dreams and aspirations) in a context of neoliberalism and globalisation. By drawing out the crucial roles that the skills, senses and body play in young women's investments in consumption, this thesis has offered a new approach to understanding capitalism in West Africa. The thesis has also contributed to an analysis of women in West Africa, painting a picture of Cameroonian women in terms other than the predominating focus on reproduction (Johnson Hanks 2006, Goheen 1996, Feldman-Savelsberg 1999) or religion (Gilbert 2014, Pype 2012), and moving beyond dominant frameworks that tie the influence of consumer cultures on young women to the sexual economy. Instead I have shown how investments in consumer cultures provide those in precarious economic, social and political conditions the means to exercise their skills, manifest industriousness and alter relations and fashion paths of upward mobility.

Aesthetic subjectivities

Arguing that, for young women, self-fashioning is a form of skill and embodied knowledge and practice, this thesis has shown how bodies are made female through investments in beauty, dress and photographs. Following Butler, who contends that "gender is a repeated stylisation of the body that congeals over time to produce an appearance of essence as a natural sort of being" (1990), this thesis has shown how young women style themselves as feminine as they embellish their bodies with cosmetics (chapter 1) and dress (chapter 2 and 3); when they pose as stars in front of the camera lens (chapter 4); and when these acts are reiterated in the embodied process of looking at the images they display and exchange (chapter 5). Contending that this repetition both unsettles and reinforces gender norms and relations, I have highlighted that while young women's practices draw on wider regimes of commodification of the female body (Benjamin 1992 [1937], Haug 1987), embedded in aesthetic capitalism (Felski 1995, Illouz 2019) and the postcolonial nation-state (Tonda 2005), they also defy them through the recognition of skills and industriousness that each iteration of beauty work involves. In doing so the thesis complicates feminist readings of beauty, aesthetics and the commodification of female bodies, and questions resistance and empowerment as adequate terms to account for

young women's practices (cf. Mahmood 2005). Rather, the performances of femininity, as crafted on the surface of bodies and their extensions (dress and photographs), reveal how aesthetic subjectivities are made (cf. Butler 1997, Warnier 2007).

Insofar as young women's visual self-fashioning consists of using their bodies as objects for display to elicit sensory engagements and for the formation of aesthetic subjectivities, this thesis has drawn out contemporary arguments about commodification of the body as central mechanisms in the operation of state power in the African postcolony (Tonda 2005, Mbembe 2001). The centrality of bodies and commodities to young women's desire to fashion upward social mobility paths resonates with these processes and constitutes them as postcolonial subjects firmly embedded in operations of power. On the other hand, insofar as such resonances are elaborated and appreciated in terms of bodily skills, crafted surfaces and their sensory excess, visual self-fashioning is irreducible to such wider operations of power, allowing young women to transform their social positions in everyday life. Thus, this thesis has argued that young women's practices speak to both the constitution and the transformation of female aesthetic subjectivities (cf. Tonda 2005).

Insofar as this constitution of aesthetic subjectivities involves and relies on immaterial value creation, it resonates with the central ways in which value is accumulated in late capitalism (cf. Edmonds 2010, Jarrin 2017, Taussig 2012). Young women's efforts to elicit sensory responses through allure resonate with scholarship that argues that immaterial value and affect embedded in the aesthetic form is key to the functioning of economies aimed at generating passionate interests and emotions (Thrift 2008, Mazarella 1995, 2017). These also point towards feminist theorisations that posit emotions, affects, feelings and sensations as central to the processes of commodification, accumulation and, by extension, to the functioning of what Illouz calls "aesthetic capitalism" (2017, 2007, Berlant 2011, Hochschild 2012 [1983]). This is apparent in how young women's practices resemble strategies of marketing or branding that focus on creating feelings and experiences to, in turn, create (surplus) value (Foster 2008, cf. Munn 1986). But, as beauty work becomes a crucial means of upward social mobility under aesthetic capitalism, including improving one's reputation, being treated with respect, finding a suitable husband and sustaining oneself through relationships with others in economic and affective ways, the fact that this is also a form of work and requires young women to constantly update their skills, remain vigilant for competitors and monitor the self—demanding they be

industrious and entrepreneurial—reveals how the production of immaterial value (allure or magic) is a particularly taxing female work (cf. Comaroff and Comaroff 2011, Illouz 2019).

By showing how beauty work fashions female aesthetic subjectivities, this thesis has contributed to literature on (female) subject formation in West Africa. In doing so I have built on Tonda's argument, highlighting the convergence of the operation of power within the religious, state and capitalist realms (2005) by accounting for how such processes form a subject by drawing on Warnier's (2007) elaboration of Mauss's techniques of the body (Mauss 1973 [1935]), and Foucault's technologies of the self (1988). In so doing, I have highlighted the bodily and sensory responses generated by engagement with material culture, i.e. cosmetics, dresses, photographs. From this perspective, while beauty work, with its focus on the body and the senses, resonates with global and gendered capitalist regimes of value creation (Illouz 2017, 2007) as much as with workings of the postcolonial state (Tonda 2005), constituting young women as subjectivities firmly embedded in the operations of power is not reducible to these processes for the actual transformations it simultaneously affords (cf. Tonda 2005).

Performing hope

Finally, we might ask why young women continue to invest in self-fashioning, not only in face of the uncertainty of its outcomes—which, as illocutionary acts, depend on the uptake of the audience (Austin 1975 [1962])—but also in the face of failure. How, furthermore, are we to make sense of what young women do amidst the broader conditions of insecurity and uncertainty prevalent in the Cameroonian postcolony (Mbembe and Roitman 1995), where action evades intention and amounts to "judicious opportunism" (Johnson-Hanks 2007, Cooper and Pratern 2015, Vigh 2008)? As I write this conclusion in 2020, many of the *filles androides* I described from 2014-2016 continue to be stuck in waithood—still unmarried—but are more successful where their careers are concerned. Some, such as Bene, a successful fashionista, emigrated. This is seen by most in Cameroon as a successful outcome irrespective of what her life in Canada may be like. She recalls with pride how she observed the styles of white women working at the embassy and made an even more appealing style for the interview. She has a stable job and a child whose father, her number one choice, left. Others, like Adelaide, have found temporary jobs, through the relationships they fashioned, in Yaoundé. Mirelle has designed her own fashion collection which, with the help of many seamstresses in her family,

is soon to be launched. She recently appeared on national TV to market it (figure 38). Indeed, success in fashion (or success thanks to fashion) is often contingent on skills—interestingly, not necessarily young women's own skills in sewing but in display value—and on kin networks, as many depend on relatives to sew clothes to their design or to teach them about textiles It would seem that beauty work while bringing economic and material benefits, opens fewer prospects for matrimony; none of the young women we met in the preceding pages has, four years later, found a suitable husband. Several of them have improved their economic standing and do have a child. This in turn opens up further questions about intimate aspirations and their exhaustion and, consequently, delay in marriage; about gender norms and relations within intimate relations and beyond; as well as economic work, and the positions and roles of women when they set up fashion businesses and migrate abroad, living as single working mothers. As Adelaide intimated in the opening to this conclusion, the re-election of Paul Biya in 2018 with another seven-year mandate has confirmed to many young women and men that the conventional paths to upward social mobility, such as education and formal employment, have to be complemented or replaced by other means. Thus, they continue to invest in visual self-fashioning and beauty work—thus the conclusion of our Skype conversation at the start of this chapter.



Figure 38. Mirelle on the CRTV speaking about her fashion collection. Photo credit: Used with the permission of the photographer (2020).

Thus, this thesis has argued, for young women and men the newness that underpins beauty work—for example, new make-up, hair and dress styles, newly arranged outfit, new *posters* and newly edited photographs—provide youth living amidst insecurity and uncertainty with hope because it re-inscribes future orientations in the present, affording anticipation in

embodied terms. This is predicated, paradoxically, on the involvement of ambiguous material forms—dress and photographs—which allow women to increase uncertainty but only so as to make it "actionable" (Archambault 2017). Hope is renewed and maintained through a temporal reorientation of embodied knowledge (cf. Miyzaki 2004) as young women stitch newer dresses, style new hairdos, photograph themselves "each time they have new clothes", and as they update their displays and circulate their images to others. From this perspective, photographic performances, whether in the studio or in front of an android camera phone, function as everyday rituals that hold young women in-between or, as they themselves put it, enable them to entertain themselves (Turner 1982, 1987). These everyday rituals articulate young women's anxieties about attaining social adulthood in a neoliberal age as much as helping to attenuate it, by envisioning the world remade (Weiss 2004). Thus, young women replicate investments in beauty work to hold wealth in prospects (Johnson-Hanks 2017).

As such, this thesis has contributed to the literature on agency and uncertainty in Africa by showing that such a hopeful renewal is embodied knowledge: when a dress hugs the body, when the body wears a new *poster*; when an act of embodied perception occurs in looking at one's and other's images, updating the display of photos on one's wall, or looking at one's phone. That is, hope is performative affect (cf. Miyazaki 2004a, cf. Crapanzano 2005) and contingent on newness: the temporality of commodity consumption itself (Benjamin 1992 [1937], Miyazaki 2004b).

Certainly, young women worldwide invest in similar practices involving beauty, dress and photography, and engage them to very similar ends. We can see how the practices of my interlocutors articulate, particularly with the contradictions around respect and seductiveness that female bodies seem to constantly generate, the broader predicament of women worldwide. But, if these young women's practices are distinct, it is because they were more generally recognised and valued in terms of skills and embodied knowledge. Beauty work, while partly apprehended through colonial, gendered and binary regimes of recognition (as when associated with prostitution) is equally recognised and valued in different terms, of embodiment and visual skills, as a matter of crafting and crafted surfaces, revealing alternate regimes of valuation. This resonates with notions of personhood that, by inventing the split of the senses, posit the separation between the exterior appearance and the inner self. Rather, this thesis has argued, the self is itself on the surface: the outcome of an exterior performance consisting of skills for crafting surfaces (Warnier 2007, Butler 1990).

Interestingly, the fact that young women's beauty work is evaluated in terms of skills and embodied knowledge is similar to the ways in which imitation is considered and valued in craft (e.g. Ingold 2010). We might then ask why it is, in both current scholarship on beauty in anthropology (e.g. Jarrin 2017, Edmonds 2012, cf. Popene 2002) and in some Western popular representations, that beautification practices are rarely considered as skills, embodied knowledge, or indeed as work. What does it tell us about broader processes of work and labour valuation when work involving the body and reproductive labour, and carried out predominantly by women, is valued less than work conventionally associated with the mind and with men? Given contemporary processes of decolonising knowledge we might thus critique analytical lenses that are predominantly used.

Finally, young women know that "marriage can become a prison", they know death is omnipresent as they stitch one dress after another for yet another funeral; they also know that many who "fall to bush" will never return. But the outcomes of their actions remain open to possibility. Young women invest in self-fashioning because what photographs and dress afford them to do is to feel hopeful about their futures amidst the political and economic turmoil that has partly compromised education and employment as viable paths of achievement and adulthood. That is, in everyday acts of dressing and photographing themselves amidst the challenging conditions of the post-Cold War Cameroon, the young women described in this thesis perform and renew the hope that they will find a suitable husband, a well-paid employment, that they or their children will travel abroad and return with good fortune for themselves and their kin—that, in fact, the "best is still to come" (figure 37). In doing so, they reveal how commodity consumption is performative of hope in affective terms, uncovering the mechanisms that characterise aesthetic capitalism at large.

References

Adeeko, Adeleke (2012) From Orality to Visuality: Panegyric and Photography in Contemporary Lagos, Nigeria. *Critical Inquiry* 38:2 (2012): 330-361

Ahmed, Sara. (2004) Affective Economies. *Social Text* 22 (2(79)): 117–139.
--- (2014) *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Second edition. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Allman, Jean. (2004) *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*. Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=252412, accessed June 6, 2018.

Alpes, Maybritt Jill. (2017) *Brokering High-Risk Migration and Illegality in West Africa*: *Abroad at Any Cost*. http://site.ebrary.com/id/11297760, accessed August 8, 2020.

Amadiume, Ifi. (1987) *Male Husbands Female Daughters*. London: Zed Books

Amin, Julius A. (2012) Understanding the Protest of February 2008 in Cameroon. *Africa Today* 58(4): 21.

Archambault, Julie Soleil. (2017) *Mobile Secrets: Youth, Intimacy, and the Politics of Pretense in Mozambique*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Arendt, Hannah 2018 [1958] Chapter 3: Labour. Chapter 4: Work. In Arendt, Hannah 2018 [1958] The human condition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 79-174

Ardener, Shirley. ed., (1975) *Perceiving Women*. London: Malaby Press.

Ardener, Shirley, and Sandra Burman, eds. (1995) *Money-Go-Rounds: The Importance of Rotating Savings and Credit Associations for Women*. Oxford : Berg.

Argenti, Nicolas (2007) *The Intestines of the State: Youth, Violence, and Belated Histories in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Argenti, Nicolas, and Ute Röschenthaler (2007) Introduction: Between Cameroon and Cuba: Youth, Slave Trades and Translocal Memoryscapes. *Social Anthropology* 14(1): 33–47.

Arnfred, Signe, ed. (2004) *Re-Thinking Sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
--- (2014) Rethinking Sexualities: A Focus on Pleasure. *Social Anthropology* 22(1): 28–31.

Austin, John L, (1975) *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon. http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198245537.001.0001, accessed June 6, 2018.

Awondo, Patrick (2016) Internet et La Fabrique Du Couple Binational Homosexuel. *Sociétés Contemporaines*, 104(4): 41–65.

Bachelard, Gaston (2010) *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos.* Boston: Beacon Press.

Barber, Karin (2007) *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
--- (2005) Text and Performance in Africa. *Oral tradition* 20: 264-277

Barthes, Roland (2000) *Camera Lucida*. Vintage Classics. London: Vintage.

Bastian, Misty (2013) Dressing for Success: The Politically Performative Quality of an Igbo Woman's Attire. In Hansen, Karen Tranberg, and D. Soyini Madison, eds. (2013) *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance. Dress, Body, Culture.* London: Bloomsbury. Pp. 15-30

Bayart, Jean-François (1989) *L'Etat En Afrique: La Politique Du Ventre*. L'Espace Du Politique. Paris: Fayard.

Beauvoir, Simone de 1976 [1949] *Le Deuxieme Sexe*. II. Paris: Gallimard.

Behrend, Heike and Zillinger Martin, (2015) Introduction: Trance mediums and new media

In Behrend, Heike, Dreschke, Anja, and Zillinger Martin eds., (2015) *Trance Mediums and New Media: Spirit Possession in the Age of Technical Reproduction*. First edition. New York: Fordham University Press. pp. 1-24
--- (2002) 'I'm like a star in my street' Photographic seld-creation in post-colonial Kenya. In Werbner, Richard P., ed., (2002) *Postcolonial subjectivities in Africa*, London: Zed Books pp. 44-62

Berthome, Francois, Bonhomme Julien and Gregory Delaplace (2012) Cultivating uncertainity. *HAU : Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2 (2): 129- 137.

Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt (1992) *Illuminations*. London: Fontana.

Berger, Harry (1994) Fictions of the Pose: Facing the Gaze of Early Modern Portraiture. *Representations* 46: 87–120.

Berger, John (1972) *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin

Berlant, Lauren Gail (1998) Intimacy: A Special Issue. *Critical Inquiry* 24(2): 281–288.
--- (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke University Press. http://www.dawsonera.com/depp/reader/protected/external/AbstractView/S9780822394716, accessed August 4, 2020.

Bernault, Florence (2015) Aesthetics of Acquisition: Notes on the Transactional Life of Persons and Things in Gabon. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57(3): 753–779.
--- (2019) *Colonial Transactions: Imaginaries, Bodies, and Histories in Gabon.* Theory in Forms. Durham: Duke University Press.

Beuvier, Franck (2014). *Danser les funérailles. Associations et lieux de pouvoir au Cameroun*. Paris: EHESS.

Bhabha, Homi K. (1994) *The Location of Culture*. London; New York: Routledge.

Boeck, Filip de, and Marie-Françoise Plissart (2004) *Kinshasa: Tales of the Invisible City.* Tervuren : Royal Museum for Central Africa

Bohannan, Paul (1956) Beauty and Scarification amongst the Tiv. *Man* 56: 117-121

Boone, Sylvia Ardyn (1986) *Radiance from the Waters: Ideals of Feminine Beauty in Mende Art*. Yale Publications in the History of Art, 34. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Bordo, Susan (2013) *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley, California : University of California Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1977) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.
--- (1979) *La Distinction: Critique Sociale Du Jugement.* Le Sens Commun. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
--- (1986) The Forms of Capital. *In Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. Westport: Greenwood, pp.241-58
--- (1990) *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Bowie, Fiona (2003) An Anthropology of Religious Experience: Spirituality, Gender and Cultural Transmission in the Focolare Movement. *Ethnos* 68(1): 49–72.

Bruijn, Mirjam de, Francis Nyamnjoh, and Inge Brinkman, eds. (2009) *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Publishers.

Bryant, Rebecca, and Daniel M. Knight (2019) *The Anthropology of the Future*. New Departures in Anthropology. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Buckley, Liam (2000) Self and Accessory in Gambian Studio Photography. *Visual Anthropology Review* 16(2): 71–91.
--- (2006) Studio Photography and the Aesthetics of Citizenship in the Gambia. In Elizabeth Edwards, Chris Gosden, and Ruth B. Phillips, eds (2006) Sensible Objects: Colonialism, Museums and Material Culture (New York, 2006) pp. 61-85
--- (2014) Photography and Photo-Elicitation after Colonialism. *Cultural Anthropology* 29(4): 720–743.

Buck-Morss, Susan (1999) *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Massachusets.: MIT Press.

Burke, Timothy (1996) *Lifebuoy Men, Lux Women: Commodification, Consumption, and Cleanliness in Modern Zimbabwe*. Body, Commodity, Text. Durham: Duke University Press.

Butler, Judith (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Thinking Gender. New York: Routledge.
--- (1993) *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*. New York: Routledge.

Ceuppens, Bambi, and Peter Geschiere (2005) Autochthony: Local or Global? New Modes in the Struggle over Citizenship and Belonging in Africa and Europe. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34(1): 385–407.

Chernoff, John Miller (2003) *Hustling Is Not Stealing: Stories of an African Bar Girl*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
--- (2005) *Exchange Is Not Robbery: More Stories of an African Bar Girl*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Christiansen, Catrine, Utas, Mats and Henrik E. Vigh ed. (2006) *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context.* Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute.

Cole, Jennifer (2004) *Fresh Contact in Tamatave, Madagascar: Sex, Money, and Intergenerational Transformation*. *American Ethnologist* 31(4): 573–588.
--- (2008) Fashioning distinction: Youth and consumerism in urban Madagascar Fashioning distinction: Youth and consumerism in urban Madagascar. In Cole, J., Durham, D. (Eds.), *Figuring the future: Youth and temporality in a global era* Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press. pp. 99–124.
--- (2010) *Sex and Salvation: Imagining the Future in Madagascar*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cole, Jennifer, and Durham, Deborah (2008) Introduction. Globalisation and the Temporality of Children and Youth. In Cole, Jennifer, and Durham, Deborah, eds. (2008) *Figuring the*

future: globalisation and the temporalities of children and youth, Santa Fe, N.M.: School for Advanced Research Press pp. 3-23

Colebrook, Claire. (2006) Introduction. *Feminist Theory* 7(2): 131–142.

Coly, Ayo A (2015) Un/Clothing African Womanhood: Colonial Statements and Postcolonial Discourses of the African Female Body. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 33(1): 12–26.

Comaroff, J., and J. L. Comaroff (1991) *Of Revelation and Revolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
--- (1992) *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination*. Studies in the Ethnographic Imagination. Boulder: Westview Press.
--- (2000) Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming. *Public Culture* 12(2): 291–343.
--- (2012) *Theory from the South:* Or, How Euro-America Is Evolving toward Africa. Boulder, Colorado : London: Paradigm Publishers.

Constable, Nicole (2009) The Commodification of Intimacy: Marriage, Sex, and Reproductive Labor. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 38: 49–64.

Cooper, Elizabeth (2018) The Importance of Being Serious: Subjectivity and Adulthood in Kenya. *Ethnos* 83(4): 665–682.

Cooper, Elizabeth, and David Pratten, eds. (2015) *Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Craik, Jennifer (1994) *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies in Fashion*. London ; New York: Routledge.

Crapanzano, Vincent (2003) Reflections on Hope as a Category of Social and Psychological Analysis. *Cultural Anthropology* 18(1): 3–32.

Csordas, Thomas J. (1990) Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos* 18(1): 5–47.

Deger, Jennifer (2016) Thick Photography. *Journal of Material Culture* 21(1): 111–132.

Deltombe, Thomas, Manuel Domergue, Jacob Tatsitsa (2016) *La Guerre Du Cameroun: L'invention de La Françafrique, 1948-1971*. Cahiers Libres. Paris: La Découverte.

Di Nunzio, Marco (2019) *The Act of Living: Street Life, Marginality, and Development in Urban Ethiopia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Diduk, Susan (1989) Women's Agricultural Production and Political Action in the Cameroon Grassfields. *Africa* 59(3): 338–355.
--- (2004) The Civility of Incivility: Grassroots Political Activism, Female Farmers, and the Cameroon State. *African Studies Review* 47(2): 27–54.

Dogbe, Esi (2003) Unraveled Yarns: Dress, Consumption, and Women's Bodies in Ghanaian Culture. *Fashion Theory* 7(3–4): 377–395.

Dongmo, Jean, Louis (1981) *Le Dynamisme Bamiléké: La Maîtrise de l'espace Urbain.* Paris: Karthala.

Dosekun, Simidele (2016) Editorial: The Politics of Fashion and Beauty in Africa. *Feminist Africa* (21): 1–6.
--- (2017) The risky business of postfeminist beauty. In: Elias, Ana Sofia, Rosalind Gill, and Christina Scharff, eds. (2017) *Aesthetic Labour: Rethinking Beauty Politics in Neoliberalism.* Dynamics of Virtual Work. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Douglas, Mary (2005) [1966] *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concept of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge Classics. London; New York: Routledge.

Durham, Deborah (2000) Youth and the Social Imagination in Africa: Introduction to Parts 1 and 2. *Anthropological Quarterly* 73(3): 113–120.
--- (2004) Disappearing Youth: Youth as a Social Shifter in Botswana. *American Ethnologist* 31(4): 589–605.

Edmonds, Alexander (2010) *Pretty Modern: Beauty, Sex, and Plastic Surgery in Brazil.* Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.

Elliot, Alice (2016) The Makeup of Destiny: Predestination and the Labor of Hope in a Moroccan Emigrant Town. *American Ethnologist* 43(3): 488–499.

Englund, Harri (1996) Witchcraft, Modernity and the Person: The Morality of accumulation in Central Malawi. *Critique of Anthropology* 16(3): 257–279.

Entwistle, Joanne, and Elizabeth Wilson, eds. (2001) *Body Dressing. Dress, Body, Culture*. Oxford ; New York: Berg.

Enwezor, Okwui (2006) *Snap Judgments : New Positions in Contemporary African Photography*. Göttingen: Steidl.
--- (2010) *Events of the self : Portraiture and Social Identity*. Contemporary African photography from The Walther Collection. Göttingen: Steidl.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. (1976) [1937] *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic among the Azande.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Federici, Silvia Beatriz (2014) [1988] Caliban and the Witch. New York, NY: Autonomedia.

Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela (1999) *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
--- (2017) Mothers on the move: reproducing belonging between Africa and Europe. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela, Flavien T. Ndonko and Bergis Schmidt-Ehry (2000) Sterilizing Vaccines or the Politics of the Womb: Retrospective Study of a Rumor in Cameroon. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 14(2): 159–179.

Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela, Flavien T. Ndonko (2010) Urbanites and Urban Villagers: Comparing ‘Home’ Among Elite and Non-Elite Bamiléké Women’s Hometown

Associations. *Africa* 80(03): 371–396.

Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela, Flavien T. Ndonko and Song Yang (2011) Remembering 'The Troubles': Reproductive Insecurity and the Management of Memory in Cameroon. *Africa* 75 (1): 10-29

Felski, Rita (2006) "Because It Is Beautiful": New Feminist Perspectives on Beauty. *Feminist Theory* 7(2): 273–282.
--- (1995) *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Ferguson, James (1999) *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt.* Berkeley: University of California Press.
--- (2006) Global shadows: Africa in the neoliberal world order. Durham : Duke University Press

Ferme, Mariane C (2001) *The underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fokwang, Jude (2010) Youth Subjectivities and Associational Life in Bamenda, Cameroon. *Africa Development* 33(3). pp.157-162 http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ad/article/view/57314, accessed August 3, 2020.
--- (2015) Fabrics of Identity: Uniforms, gender and Associations in the Cameroon Grassfields. *Africa* 85 (4): 677-696

Fortes, Meyer (2018) [1949] Web of kinship among the Tallensi: The Second Part of an Analysis of the Social Structure of a Trans-Volta Tribe. London: Routledge.

Foster, Robert J (2008) Commodities, Brands, Love and Kula: Comparative Notes on Value Creation in Honor of Nancy Munn. *Anthropological Theory* 8(1): 9–25.
--- (2013) Things to do with brands: creating and calculating value. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3(1):44-63

Foucault, Michel (1976) *Histoire de La Sexualité*. Bibliothèque Des Histoires. Paris: Gallimard.

--- (1988) Technologies of the Self in Martin, Luther H., ed. (1988) Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.
--- (1997) *La volonté de savoir*. Histoire de la sexualité, Michel Foucault ; 1. Paris: Gallimard.
--- (2004) *L'usage des plaisirs*. Histoire de la sexualité, Michel Foucault ; 2. Paris: Gallimard.

Frazer, James George (1981) [1890] The Golden Bough: The Roots of Religion and Folklore. New York: Avenel Books

Freeman, Carla (2001) Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization. *Signs* 26(4). JSTOR, University of Chicago Press: 1007–1037.
--- (2014) Entrepreneurial Selves: An Introduction In Freeman, Carla (2014) Entrepreneurial Selves: Neoliberal Respectability and the Making of a Caribbean Middle Class Durham : Duke University Press. pp. 1-17

Friedman, Jonathan (1994) Introduction. in Friedman, Jonathan (1994) ed., *Consumption and Identity*. Chur : Harwood Academic Publishers. Pp. 1-16
--- (1994) The political economy of elegance: an African Cult of Beauty, in Friedman, Jonathan (1994) ed. *Consumption and Identity*. Chur : Harwood Academic Publishers. Pp. 120-134

Fuh, Divine (2009) *Beyond the Rhetoric of Violence: Towards a Re-Imagination of Youth in Contemporary Africa*. Unpublished Paper.
--- (2012) The Prestige Economy: Veteran Clubs and Young men's Competition in Bamenda, Cameroon. *Urban Forum* 23(4): 501–526.

Galega, S, and M. Tumnde (2004) Reversing Decades of Gender Injustice in Cameroon. In Mbaku John, Takougang Joseph (2004) *The Leadership Challange: Cameroon under Paul Biya*. Trenton NJ: Africa World Press. pp. 235-267

Galland, Emmanuel (2016) *Figures et Imaginaires de La Réussite Sociale à Yaoundé : Les Enjeux Moraux d'un Débat Public*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. Aix-Marseille Universite.

Gandalou, J.D. (1989) *Dandies à Bacongo: Le Culte de l'élégance Dans La Société*

Congolaise Contemporaine. Paris: L'Harmattan,.

Gell, Alfred (1988) The technology of enchantment and the enchantment of technology in Coote, Jeremy, and Anthony Shelton ed (1992) *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. pp. 40-63
--- (1998) *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford : Clarendon Press.
--- (2011) [1996] *On Love*. Anthropology of This Centaury 2.

Geschiere, Peter ed. (2013) *Witchcraft, Intimacy, and Trust: Africa in Comparison*. Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press.
--- (2009) *The perils of belonging. Authochtony, citizenship and exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press.

Geschiere, Peter, and Peter Jackson (2006) Autochthony and the Crisis of Citizenship: Democratisation, Decentralisation, and the Politics of Belonging. *African Studies Review* 49(2): 1–7.

Geschiere, Peter, and Francis Nyamnjoh (2000) Capitalism and Autochthony: The Seesaw of Mobility and Belonging. *Public Culture* 12(2): 423–452.

Geschiere, Peter and Piet Konings (1993) Alternative modes of accumulation and their regional variations. In Geschiere, Peter and Piet Konings (1993) *Intinerarires d'accumulation au Cameroun.* Paris : Karthala

Giddens, Anthony (1992) *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love, and Eroticism in Modern Societies*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Gilbert, Juliet (2014) *"Destiny Is Not Where You Are Now": Fashioning New Pentecostal Subjectivities among Young Women in Calabar, Nigeria*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of Oxford.
--- (2018) 'They'Re My Contacts, Not My Friends': Reconfiguring Affect and Aspirations Through Mobile Communication in Nigeria. *Ethnos* 83(2): 237–254.
--- (2019) Mobile Identities: Photography, Smartphones and Aspirations in Urban Nigeria. *Africa* 89(2): 246–265.

Goheen, Mitzi (1996) *Men Own the Fields, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
--- Les champs appartiennent aux hommes, les recoltes au femmes: accumulatio dans le region de Nso. In Geschiere, Peter and Piet Konings (1993) *Intinerarires d'accumulation au Cameroun.* Paris : Karthala pp. 241-271

Goffman, Erving (1990) [1956] *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. London : Penguin

Gondola, Ch. Didier (1999) Dream and Drama: The Search for Elegance among Congolese Youth. *African Studies Review* 42(1): 23.

Gott, Edith Suzanne, and Kristyne Loughran, eds. (2010) *Contemporary African Fashion. African Expressive Cultures*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Groes-Green, Christian (2013) "To Put Men in a Bottle": Eroticism, Kinship, Female Power, and Transactional Sex in Maputo, Mozambique. *American Ethnologist* 40(1): 102–117.

Guyer, Jane I. (1993) Wealth in People and Self-Realization in Equatorial Africa. *Man* 28(2): 243.
--- (2005) Comment on When the Future Decides: Uncertainty and Intentional Action in Contemporary Cameroon. *Current Anthropology* 46(3): 379.

Guyer, Jane I., and Belinga, SME. (1995) Wealth in People, Wealth in Things. *The Journal of African History* 36(01): 83.

Hage, Ghassan (2003) Against Paranoid Nationalism: Searching for Hope in a Shrinking Society. Annandale : Pluto Press Australia

Haney, Erin (2010) *Photography and Africa*. London: Reaktion Books.

Hansen, Karen Tranberg (2003) Fashioning: Zambian Moments. *Journal of Material Culture* 8(3): 301–309.
--- (2005) Getting Stuck in the Compound: Some Odds against Social Adulthood in Lusaka,

Zambia. *Africa Today* 51(4): 3–16.
--- (2013) Introduction. In Hansen, Karen Tranberg, and D. Soyini Madison, eds. (2013) *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance. Dress, Body, Culture.* London: Bloomsbury. Pp. 1-15

Haug, Wolfgang Fritz (1987) *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality, and Advertising in Capitalist Society*. Polity Press.

Hendriks, Thomas (2019) Queer(Ing) Popular Culture: Homo-Erotic Provocations from Kinshasa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 31(1): 71–88.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (2003) [1983] *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley, California: University of California Press.

Hodgson, Dorothy Louise, and Sheryl A. Mc Curdy, eds. (2005) *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*. Social History of Africa. Portsmouth : Heinemann

Honwana, Alcinda Manuel (2012) *The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa*. Va: Kumarian Press

Honwana, Alcinda Manuel, and Filip de Boeck (2014) *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*. Oxford: James Currey.

Hunter, Mark (2010) *Love in the Time of AIDS: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Hurault, Jean (1962) *La Structure Sociale Des Bamiléké*. Paris: Le Monde d'Outre-Mer Passé et Présent.

Illouz, Eva (2013) *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*. Massachusetts : Polity. http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:101:1-201502156081, accessed August 4, 2020.
--- (2018) *Emotions as Commodities: Capitalism, Consumption and Authenticity*. London: Routledge.

Irigaray, Luce (1997) *Etre Deux*. Paris: B. Grasset.

Jackson, Michael (1989) *Paths toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry.* African Systems of Thought. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Jackson, Michael, and Ivan Karp (1990) *Personhood and Agency: The Experience of Self and Other in African Cultures*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis: Uppsala

Jarrín, Alvaro (2017) *The Biopolitics of Beauty: Cosmetic Citizenship and Affective Capital in Brazil*. Oakland, California: University of California Press.

Johnson-Hanks, Jennifer (2002) On the Limits of Life Stages in Ethnography: Toward a Theory of Vital Conjunctures. *American Anthropologist* 104(3): 865–880.
--- (2005) When the Future Decides: Uncertainty and Intentional Action in Contemporary Cameroon. *Current Anthropology* 46(3): 363–385.
--- (2006) *Uncertain Honor: Modern Motherhood in an African Crisis*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
--- (2007) Women on the Market: Marriage, Consumption, and the Internet in Urban Cameroon. *American Ethnologist* 34(4): 642–658.
--- (2017) Vital Conjunctures Revisited in Kreager, Philip, and Astrid Bochow, eds (2017). *Fertility, Conjuncture, Difference: Anthropological Approaches to the Heterogeneity of Modern Fertility Declines*. New York: Berghahn Books. pp. 326-338

Jones, Carla (2007) Fashion and Faith in Urban Indonesia. *Fashion Theory* 11(2–3): 211–231.

Jua, Nantang (2003) Differential Responses to Disappearing Transitional Pathways: Redefining Possibility among Cameroonian Youths. *African Studies Review* 46(2): 13.

Kaberry, Phyllis Mary (2004) [1952] *Women of the Grassfields: A Study of the Economic Position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons*. London : Routledge. http://public.eblib.com/choice/publicfullrecord.aspx?p=256892, accessed August 3, 2020.

Konings, Piet (2006) Solving Transportation Problems in African Cities: Innovative

Responses by the Youth in Douala, Cameroon. *Africa Today* 53(1): 35–50.
---- (2007) Church-State Relations in Cameroon's Postcolony: The Case of the Roman Catholic Church. *Journal for the Study of Religion* 20(2): 45–64.
--- (2008a) Autochthony and Ethnic Cleansing in the Post-Colony: The 1966 Tombel Disturbances in Cameroon. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41(2): 203–222.
--- (2008b) Privatisation and Labour Militancy: The Case of Cameroon's Tea Estates. *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 26(1): 51–70.
--- (2011) *The Politics of Neoliberal Reforms in Africa: State and Civil Society in Cameroon.* Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa

Latour, Bruno (2010) On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods. Science and Cultural Theory. Durham : Duke University Press.

Lawyer, Linda Ankiambom (2017) The Changing Character of Democaracy in the Pre and Post Colonial Cameroon: An Old Practice, a New World. *Journal of Advanced Research in Social Sciences and Humanities* 2(1): 43–53.

Le Vine, Victor, T (1964) *The Cameroons: From Mandate to Independence*. Berkeley: University of Califormia Press.

Lienhardt, Goffrey (1985) Self: public, private. Some African representations. In Carrithers, Michael, Collins, Steven and Lukes Steven (1985) The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 141-158

Gilles Lipovetsky and Jean Serroy (2013), *L'esthétisation du monde. Vivre à l'âge du capitalisme artiste*. Paris, Gallimard.

Lorde, Audrey (1993) [1987] The Uses of the Erotic.The Erotic as Power. In Abelove, Henry, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M Halperin, *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader.* Abingdon: Taylor & Francis.

Mahmood, Saba (2001) Feminist Theory, Embodiment, and the Docile Agent: Some Reflections on the Egyptian Islamic Revival. *Cultural Anthropology* 16(2): 202–236.

--- (2005) *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Massumi, Brian (1995) The Autonomy of Affect. *Cultural Critique* 31:83-109

Masquelier, Adeline (2013) Forging Connections, Performing Distinctions: Youth, Dress and Consumption in Niger. In Hansen, Karen Tranberg, and D. Soyini Madison, eds. (2013) *African Dress: Fashion, Agency, Performance. Dress, Body, Culture.* London: Bloomsbury. Pp. 138-153

Malinowski, Bronislaw (1993) [1922] The Early Writings of Bronislaw Malinowski. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mauss, Marcel (1972) [Mauss and Hubert, 1902] *A General Theory of Magic*. London: Routledge
--- (1973) [1935] Techniques of the Body. *Economy and Society* 2(1): 70–88.

Mazzarella, William (2003) "Very Bombay": Contending with the Global in an Indian Advertising Agency. *Cultural Anthropology* 18(1): 33–71.
--- (2017) *The Mana of Mass Society*. Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Mbembe, Achille and Janet Roitman (1995) Figures of the Subject in Times of Crisis. *Public Culture* 7(2): 323–352.

Mbembe, Achille (2001) *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Meyer, Brigit (2010) Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism's Sensational Forms. *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109(4): 741–763.

Miafo Dieudonne and Jean-Pierre Warnier (1993) Accumulation et ethos de la notabilite chez les Bamiléké. In Geschiere, Peter and Piet Konings (1993) *Intinerarires d'accumulation au Cameroun.* Paris : Karthala pp. 9-33

Miller, Daniel (1987) *Material Culture and Mass Consumption*. Social Archaeology. Oxford: Blackwell.
--- (1995) *Worlds Apart: Modernity through the Prism of the Local*. The Uses of Knowledge. London: Routledge.
--- (2000) The Fame of Trinis: Websites as Traps. *Journal of Material Culture* 5(1): 5–24.
--- (2005) Introduction. In Küchler, Susanne, and Daniel Miller, eds. (2005) Clothing as Material Culture. Oxford, UK ; New York: Berg. pp. 1-20

Miyazaki, Hirokazu (2004) *The Method of Hope: Anthropology, Philosophy, and Fijian Knowledge*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
--- (2006) Economy of Dreams: Hope in Global Capitalism and Its Critiques. *Cultural Anthropology* 21(2): 147–172.

Moeran, Brian (2017) Fashion Magazines and Fashion as a System of Magic. *Anthropology Today* 33(2): 3–9.

Mokake, Flavius, Akanamu Adebayo, Olutayo Adesina, and Rasheed Olaniyi (2010) The Kabba Dress: Identity and Modernity in Contemporary Cameroon. *In* Marginality and Crisis: Globalisation and Identity in Contemporary Africa. Lexington Books. pp. 10–18.

Monga, Yvette (2000)« Au village ! »: Space, culture and politics in Cameroon. *Cahiers d'études africaines* 40(160): 723–750.

Morris, Rosalind C. (1995) All Made Up: Performance Theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24(1): 567–592.

Mougoué, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta (2019) Guest Editor's Introduction to Bodily Practices and Aesthetic Rituals in Twentieth- and Twenty-First-Century Africa Forum. *African Studies Review* 62(2): 72–79.
--- (2019) Over-Making Nyanga : Mastering "Natural" Beauty and Disciplining Excessive Bodily Practices In Metropolitan Cameroon. *African Studies Review* 62(2): 175–198.
--- (2020) Introduction "What the Women of a Nation Are, So Shall the Nation Be". In Mougoué, Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta (2020) Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon. Michigan : Michigan University Press. pp. 3-57

Mulo Farenkia, B (2011) Formes de « mise à distance » de l'altérité ethnique au Cameroun. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43(6): 1484–1497.

Munn, Nancy D (1986) *The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society*. The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures, 1976. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press.

Mustafa, Hudita, N. (2002) Portraits of modernity: popular photography and desiring selves in Dakarois Fashion in Landau, Paul Stuart, and Deborah D Kaspin eds (2002) *Images and Empires : Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp. 172-192
--- (2006) Eros, Beauty and Crisis: Notes from Senegal. *Feminist Africa* (6): 20–32.

Ndjio, Basile (2005) Carrefour de La Joie: Popular Deconstruction of the African Postcolonial Public Sphere. *Africa* 75(3):265–294.
--- (2008) Mokoagne Moni: Sorcery and New Forms of Wealth in Cameroon. *Past & Present* 199 (3): 271–289.
--- (2012) Post-colonial histories of sexuality: the political invention of a libidinal African straight. *Africa* 82(4): 609-631

Newell, Sasha (2009) Godrap Girls, Draou Boys, and the Sexual Economy of the Bluff in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoir, *Ethnos* 74 (3):379-402
--- (2012) *The Modernity Bluff: Crime, Consumption, and Citizenship in Côte d'Ivoire.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
--- (2016) Circuitously Parisian: Sapeur Parakinship and the Affective Circuitry of Congolese Style in Cole, Jennifer and Chirtian Groes (2016) eds. *Affective circuits: African migrations to Europe and the Pursuit of Social Regenration* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp.270-298

Nkwi, Paul Nchoji, and Francis B. Nyamnjoh, eds. (2011) Regional Balance and National Integration in Cameroon: Lessons Learned and the Uncertain Future. Bamenda: Langaa

Nyamnjoh, Francis B (1999) Cameroon: a country united by ethnic ambition and difference.

African Affairs 98(390): 101–118.
--- (2002) 'A Child is one's person's only in the womb': domestication, agency and subjectivity in the Cameroonian Grassfields in Werbner, Richard ed., (2002) *Postcolonial subjectivities in Africa*, London: Zed Books. pp. 111-139
--- (2005) *Fishing in Troubled Waters: Disquettes and Thiofs in Dakar*. *Africa*: 75(3): 295–324.
--- (2011) *Married but Available*. Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa

Nyamnjoh, Francis B., Deborah Durham, and Jude Fokwang (2002) The Domestication of Hair and Modernised Consciousness in Cameroon: A Critique in the Context of Globalisation. *Identity, Culture and Politics* 3 (2): 98–124.

Nyamjoh, Francis B., and Ben Page (2002) Whiteman Kontri and the enduring allure of modernity among Cameroonian youth, *African Affairs*, 101 (405): 607-634

Nyamnjoh, Francis B, Paul Nchoji Nkwi, and Piet Konings (2012) *University Crisis and Student Protests in Africa.* https://catalogue.solent.ac.uk/openurl/44SSU_INST/44SSU_INST:VU1?u.ignore_date_coverage=true&rft.mms_id=9997117604004796, accessed August 3, 2020.

Nyamnjoh, Francis, and Divine Fuh (2014) Africans Consuming Hair, Africans Consumed by Hair. *Africa Insight* 44(1): 52–68.

Nyamjoh, Francis, and Jude Fokwang (2005), Entertaining repression: Music and politics in postcolonial Cameroon, *African Affairs*, 104 (415): 251–274

Ongoum, Louis Marie (1979) Eros Bamiléké. *ABBIA* 4 (35-36–37): 297–358.

Ortner, Sherry B. (1972) Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture? *Feminist Studies* 1(2): 5.

den Ouden, Jan H. B. (1987) In Search of Personal Mobility: Changing Interpersonal Relations in Two Bamiléké Chiefdoms, Cameroon. *Africa* 57(1): 3–27.

Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́ (1997) *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western*

Gender Discourses. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Page, Ben, Martin Evans, and Claire Mercer (2010) Revisiting the Politics of Belonging in Cameroon. *Africa* 80(3): 345–370.

Pigeaud, Fanny (2011) *Au Cameroun de Paul Biya*. Les Terrains Du Siècle. Paris: Karthala.

Pinney, Christopher (1997) *Camera Indica: The Social Life of Indian Photographs.* Envisioning Asia. London: Reaktion.
--- (2011) *Photography and Anthropology*. London: Reaktion Books.

Pinther, Kerstin, and Julia Ng (2007) Textiles and Photography in West Africa. *Critical Interventions* 1(1): 113–123.

Piot, Charles (1991) Of Persons and Things: Some Reflections on African Spheres of Exchange. *Man* 26 (3):405-424
--- (1999) *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
--- (2010) *Nostalgia for the Future: West Africa after the Cold War*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Pommerolle, Marie-Emmanuelle and Ngameni, Nadine Machikou (2015) Fabrics of Loyalty: The politics of international women's day wax print cloth in Cameroon. *Africa* 85 (4): 656-676

Poole, Deborah Ann (1997) *Vision, Race, and Modernity : A Visual Economy of The Andean Image World*. Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Popenoe, Rebecca (2004) *Feeding Desire: Fatness, Beauty, and Sexuality among a Saharan People*. London : Routledge.

Povinelli, Elizabeth A (2011) *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism*. Durham : Duke University Press.

Pradelles de Latour, Charles Henry (1991) *Ethnopsychanalyse En Pays Bamiléké*. Paris: EPEL.

Pradelles de Latour, Marie-Lorraine (1980) Paroles d'hommes, Images de Femmes. *L'Homme* 20(1): 117–125.

Pype, Katrien (2012) The Making of the Pentecostal Melodrama: Religion, Media and Gender in Kinshasa. Anthropology of the Media. New York: Berghahn Books.
--- (2016) Blackberry Girls and Jesus's Brides. *Journal of Religion in Africa* 46(4): 390–416.
--- (2020) Bolingo Ya Face – Digital Marriages, Playfulness and the search for change in Kinshasa. *In* . Helle-Valle, Jo, and Ardis Storm-Mathisen, eds. (2020) Media Practices and Changing African Socialities: Non-Media-Centric Perspectives. Anthropology of Media, New York: Berghahn Books. pp. 93-119

Rocamora, Agnes (2011) Personal Fashion Blogs: Screens and Mirrors in Digital Self-portraits, *Fashion Theory* 15:4 407-424

Röschenthaler, Ute (2011) Purchasing Culture: The Dissemination of Associations in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria. Trenton: Africa World Press.
--- (2015) Introduction: united in dress. Negotiating gender and hierarchy with Festival uniforms. Africa 85(04): 628–634.
--- (2016) Good Quality or Low Price? Competition between Cameroonian and Chinese Traders. African East-Asian Affairs (1–2). http://aeaa.journals.ac.za/pub/article/view/169, accessed August 11, 2020.

Röschenthaler, Ute, and Antoine Socpa (2017) The China Challenge: Cameroonians Between Discontent and Popular Admiration. *In* China and Africa, Kim Young-Chang (Ed). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 155–188.

Rovine, Victoria L. (2009) Viewing Africa through Fashion. *Fashion Theory* 13(2): 133–139.

Rowlands, Michael (1993) Accumulation and the cultural politics of identity in the Grassfields. In Geschiere, Peter and Piet Konings (1993) *Intinerarires d'accumulation au Cameroun.* Paris : Karthala pp. 71-99

--- (1994) The material cultue of success, Ideals and Life Cycles in Cameroon. In Friedman, Jonathan (1994) ed., *Consumption and Identity.* Chur: Harwood Academic Publishers. pp. 106-119

Schneider, Jürg (2018) Views of Continuity and Change: The Press Photo Archives in Buea, Cameroon. *Visual Studies* 33(1): 28–40.

Shanklin, Eugenia (1990) Anlu remembered: the Kom women's rebellion of 1958-61. *Dialectical Anthropology* 15(2-3): 159–181.

Simone, Abdoumaliq (2005) Urban Circulation and the Everyday Politics of African Urban Youth: The Case of Douala, Cameroon. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(3): 516–532.

Socpa, Antoine (1990) *Les Camps de Regroupement Dans La Chefferie de Babadjou* (*Ouest-Cameroun): 1956-1976.* Unpublished master thesis. University of Yaounde.
--- (2006) Bailleurs Autochtones Et Locataires Allogènes: Enjeu Foncier Et Participation Politique Au Cameroun. *African Studies Review* 49(2): 45–67.
--- (2010) New kinds of land conflict in urban Cameroon: the case of the "landless" indigenous peoples in Yaounde, *Africa*: 80(4): 553–572.

Sprague, Stephen (1988) How Yoruba see themselves. in Pinney, Christopher, and Nicolas Peterson (2003) eds., *Photography's Other Histories*. Durham: Duke University Press. pp. 240-260

Spronk, Rachel (2014) Sexuality and Subjectivity: Erotic Practices and the Question of Bodily Sensations: Sexuality and Subjectivity. *Social Anthropology* 22(1): 3–21.

Stoler, Ann Bene (1995) *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Stoller, Paul (1989) *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology.* Contemporary Ethnography Series. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Strassler, Karen (2010) *Refracted Visions : Popular Photography and National Modernity in Java*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Strother, Zoe (2013) "A photograph steals the soul" The history of an idea. In Peffer, John, and Elisabeth Lynn Cameron, eds. (2013) Portraiture & Photography in Africa. African Expressive Cultures. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Pp. 177-212

Sylvanus, Nina (2016) *Patterns in Circulation: Cloth, Gender, and Materiality in West Africa.* Chicago ; The University of Chicago Press.
--- (2013) Fashionability in colonial and postcolonial Togo. In Hansen K. T. and Madison D. (2013) *African dress: Fashion, agency, performance*. Oxford : Berg pp. 30-44

Takougang, Joseph, and Julius A. Amin, eds. (2018) Post-Colonial Cameroon: Politics, Economy, and Society. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Tamale, Sylvia (2005) Eroticism, Sensuality and "Women's Secrets" among the Baganda: A Critical Analysis. *Feminist Africa* 5: 9–36.
--- (2015) "Keep Your Eyes off My Thighs": A Feminist Analysis of Uganda's "Miniskirt Law." *Feminist Africa* 21(1): 83–90.

Tardits, Charles (1969) *Contribution a l'etude Des Populations Bamiléké de l'Ouest Cameroun*. Paris: Berger-Levrault.

Tarlo, Emma, and Annelies Moors, eds. (2013) *Islamic Fashion and Anti-Fashion: New Perspectives from Europe and North America*. London: Bloomsbury.

Taussig, Michael (1993) Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses. New York: Routledge.
--- (1999) Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.

Terretta, Meredith (2013) Petitioning for Our Rights, Fighting for Our Nation the History of the Democratic Union of Cameroonian Women, 1949-1960. Oxford: Langaa RPCIG. http://site.ebrary.com/id/10677897, accessed August 3, 2020.

Thomas, Lynn M (2003) *Politics of the Womb: Women, Reproduction, and the State in Kenya*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
--- (2006) The modern girl and racial respectability in 1930s South Africa. *The Journal of African History* 47(3): 461–490. Add her newer book?
---- (2020) Introduction : A layered history. In Thomas, Lynn (2020) *Beneath the Surface. A transnational Hisotry of Skin Lighteners*. Durham : Duke University Press pp. 1-21

Thrift, Nigel (2008) The material practices of glamour. *Journal of Cultural Economy* 1(1): 9–23.

Todd, Lotero (1982) *Cameroon.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.

Tonda, Joseph (2005) *Le Souverain Moderne: Le Corps Du Pouvoir En Afrique Centrale* (Congo, Gabon). Collection "Hommes et Sociétés." Paris: Karthala.
--- (2015) L'imperialisme postcolonial: critique de la societe des eblouissements. Paris: Karthala

Turner, Terence 2012 [1980] The Social Skin. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 2(2): 486–504.

Turner, Victor W. (1982) *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play.* Performance Studies Series, New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications.
--- (1986) *The Anthropology of Performance.* New York: PAJ Publications.

Veblen, Thorstein (1953) [1988] *The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions*. New York: New American Library

Vigh, Henrik (2006) *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau.* Methodology and History in Anthropology. New York: Berghahn Books.
--- (2009) Motion Squared: A Second Look at the Concept of Social Navigation. *Anthropological Theory* 9(4): 419–438.

Vokes, Richard (2012) On the ultimate patronage machine: photography and substantial

relations in rural south-western Uganda. In Vokes, Richard (2012) *Photography in Africa : Ethnographic Perspectives*. Woodbridge, Suffolk; New York: James Currey. Pp. 207-228
--- (2019) Photographies in Africa in the Digital Age. *Africa* 89(2): 207–224.

Walker-Said, Charlotte (2015) Wealth, Law and Moral Authority: Marriage and Christian Mobilisation in Interwar Cameroon, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. 48 (3): 393-424
--- (2017) Christian Marriage between Tradition and Modernity: Catholic and Protestant Women and Marriage Education in Late Colonial Cameroon, 1939-1960: Catholic and Protestant Women and Marriage Education in Late Colonial Cameroon. *Gender & History* 29(3): 544–569.

Warnier, Jean-Pierre (1993) *L'esprit d'entreprise Au Cameroun.* Les Afriques. Paris: Editions Karthala.
--- (2007) *The Pot-King: The Body and Technologies of Power*. African Social Studies Series, Leiden : Brill.

Weber, Charles William (1993) *International Influences and Baptist Mission in West Cameroon: German-American Missionary Endeavor under International Mandate and British Colonialism.* Studies in Christian Mission, Leiden : Brill.

Weinbaum, Alys Eve, and Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, eds. (2008) The *Modern Girl around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization.* Next Wave. Durham: Duke University Press.

Weiner, Annette B. (1992) *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Weiss, Brad (2009) *Street Dreams and Hip Hop Barbershops: Global Fantasy in Urban Tanzania.* Tracking Globalization. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
--- (2004) *Producing African futures: ritual and reproduction in a neoliberal age*. Leiden : Brill

Wendl, Tobias (2001a) Entangled Histories. *RES: Anthropology and Aesthethics* 39: 78–101.

--- (2001b) Visions of Modernity in Ghana: Mami Wata Shrines, Photo Studios and Horror Films. *Visual Anthropology* 14(3): 269–292.

White, Luise (1990) *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Williams, Raymond (1977) *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford : Oxford University Press.

Wolf, Naomi (1990) *The Beauty Myth*. London : Chatto&Windus.

Zeitlyn, David (2010a). Photographic Props / The Photographer as Prop: The Many Faces of Jacques Toussele. *History and Anthropology* 21 (4):453- 477.
--- (2010b) Representation/Self-representation: A Tale of Two Portraits; or, Portraits and Social Science Representations. Visual Anthropology 23 (5): 398-426
--- (2019) Photo History by Numbers: Charting the Rise and Fall of Commercial Photography in Cameroon. *Visual Anthropology* 32(3–4): 309–342.

Zelizer, Viviana A. (2005) The Purchase of Intimacy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Zigon, Jarrett (2009) Hope Dies Last: Two Aspects of Hope in Contemporary Moscow. *Anthropological Theory* 9(3): 253–271.

Films

Khan, Farhan (2010) Illuminati – The Music Industry Exposed

Wendl, Tobias (1998) Future Remebrance: Photography and Image Arts in Ghana

Homb, Ebenezer, (2018) Les Filles Android
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zzNnYc8DtZc

Ntamack, Thierry (2014) Le blanc d'Eyenga 1 https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2amcyq

Newspapers

Le Soir; Port vestimentaire: Stop au Dos et Ventre dehors (DVD)" par Ndjomo Eric Martial 22 Novembre 2013, Yaoundé, Cameroon

L'Anecdote "Assainissement des mœurs vestimentaires: La prochaine déculottée des autorités administratives" par Anatole Bihina, 02 Décembre 2013, Yaoundé, Cameroon

Other sources

Republic of Cameroon, Presidency of the Republic (2014) HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH ON THE OCCASION OF THE 48TH EDITION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY

Republic of Cameroon, Presidency of the Republic (2016) HEAD OF STATE'S MESSAGE TO THE YOUTH ON THE OCCASION OF THE 50TH EDITION OF THE NATIONAL YOUTH DAY (2016)

International Organisation for Migration (2016) Cameroon Migration Profile