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Branches Above and Roots Below: Mothers' Hopes for their Children in Batoufam, Cameroon

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Branches Above and Roots Below: Mothers' Hopes for their Children in Batoufam, Cameroon

Independent Study Project by Taylor Maxfield
Creative Accompaniment: *Batoufam, Ta Racine*, a Children's Book

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Abstract

In order to delve into the desires that rural Cameroonian communities have for the future generation, this research project consisted of formally interviewing ten mothers in the village of Batoufam about what hopes they have for their children. This study highlighted on what they would like for their children, the way they raise their children to achieve their aspirations, and their opinions on the importance of preserving tradition for their children. The findings of this study are humble and rooted dreams of being able to care for one's basic needs and the needs of a family. Batoufam mothers, along with the entire village, raise children in a way to respect cultural values of sharing and unity and the expectation of preserving tradition. The hope for branching out into the world in travel and education is strong, but just as strong is the hope that children will forever remain tied to where they came from.

Pour apprendre les désires des communautés rurales Camerounaise pour la prochaine génération, ce projet de recherche a été composé des entretiens formels des dix mères dans le village de Batoufam sur leurs espoirs pour leurs enfants. Cette étude a mis l'emphase sur ce qu'elles veulent pour leurs enfants, la façon dont elles élèvent leurs enfants réaliser leurs aspirations, et leurs avis de l'importance de préserver la tradition pour leurs enfants. Les résultats de cette étude sont les rêves humbles et enracinés qui s'agissent d'être capable de prendre soin des besoins de soi et les besoins de la famille. Les mères Batoufam, avec tout le village, élèvent les enfants à respecter les valeurs culturelles de partager et rester dans l'ensemble et l'attente de préserver la tradition. L'espoir de se ramifier dans le monde avec le voyage et l'éducation est forte, mais également forte est l'espoir que les enfants vont rester toujours liés au village où ils viennent.

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Introduction

When it comes to development, one of the most basic goals from any perspective is to realize a better future. For the next generation, we envision a better life. What I started to wonder during my time in Cameroon, however, was who it was projecting these hopes of future. It is foreign organizations and foreign governments who are pushing Cameroon into a “better” tomorrow? I believe that if there is a hope for the amelioration of the country, that hope should come from its inhabitants. Thus, I became interested in the hopes that Cameroonians had for their future. Observing the importance of motherhood and raising children in the country’s culture, I decided to focus on mothers’ hopes for their children. I settled on this topic for one main reason: mothers have the primary responsibility to raise children in Cameroon. Thus, children are greatly exposed to the values and worldviews of their mothers throughout childhood. Mothers are birthing and raising the future, in a sense. Further narrowing my research, I decided to focus on rural Cameroonian mothers as my target population. My sample population came from ten women living in the village of Batoufam, a rural Bamiléké village that is still very intertwined with tradition. It is a largely polygamist village of 12,000, still led by a tradition chef, his majesty Fô Nayang Toukam Innocent.¹ This decision was made intentionally to get a perspective from a population with less Western influence, as I was initially very interested in modernization growing out of the roots of traditional culture.

My first research question was quite simple: what hopes do mothers in Batoufam have for their children? I hypothesized that mothers hoped for their children to go to school and get a good job, supporting parents in their old age. My second question delved into the importance of tradition: what is the importance of traditional preservation for mothers in the lives of their children? I predicted that preserving tradition was very important. Finally, my third question inquired into the “how” of achieving mothers’ hopes: how do mothers raise

¹ Paule Dassi

their children to achieve their aspirations? I predicted that they taught by example and encouraged verbally.

For my research, it was important to define “hope” and “tradition”. A hope is simply a desire that looks towards the future. However, there are several senses of tradition that Batoufam inhabitants consider varyingly. Dictionary.com defines tradition as: the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs, information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice.² From my research, I have noted that tradition is like a big folder of documents. Some people prefer to keep it all together, but some pick and choose. I have discerned three main aspects of tradition in Batoufam. First, there are traditional cultural values, like respect. Second, there are traditional events, like *funerailles*³. Third, there are traditional, spiritual rituals like sacrifices made to ancestors.

In this social analysis, I will explain my methodology and then move from one research question to the next, showing my finding. What I found in my research is that mothers of Batoufam have simple hopes for their children to go to school and take care of their basic needs, retain traditional values and honor their traditional roots. As for Batoufam child-rearing in light of future hopes, I will show that education happens fluidly at home and in the community, but school is emphasized for a better tomorrow. In the end, my research shows that mothers desire their children to grow, branching out into the wider world and reaching up for higher education. Like a tree growing tall, however, they hope and expect that their children’s roots will be equally large in proportion, firmly planted in the way of life and tradition that they grow up with.

² Dictionary.com

³ Traditional celebrations of life that happen after burial, sometimes years after the death of the person or persons being celebrated

Methodology

The methodology for this project was mainly qualitative research through interviews. Before arriving in Batoufam, I searched online for secondary sources. I found other studies that had been done in various countries regarding the hopes of parents or mothers, specifically, for their children. Upon arriving in Batoufam on November 11th, 2015, I began integrating into the community in several ways that contributed to my research.

Firstly, I stayed with a host family in a polygamist concession. I lived with a host father, his four wives, many children and grandchildren, and the family of his younger brother. This was the most valuable source of observation and participant observation regarding mothers' hopes for their children. I was able to observe child-rearing first-hand and note the skills being taught and values being instilled by the many mothers on the concession. I also observed the role of motherhood in a polygamist family, with children of other wives as well. In addition, I observed various events on the concession that highlighted motherly hoping, such as a traditional wedding and a child falling very ill. As for participant observation, living with a Batoufam family gave me a taste of mothering myself, as I had two main mamas to look after me. Their questions, concerns, instructions, and celebrations for me gave insight into what hopes mothers have in their children.

Other ways I integrated into the community include Bible studies and Sunday services at the evangelical church in the Chila neighborhood, one of six churches in Batoufam and one of four evangelical churches in the village. I did not expect it, but the time I spent with this parish also offered observation as well that consisted of motherhood and child-rearing.

Interviewing mamas was a very important and intentional choice for my research. First of all, it was important to hear directly from mothers and offer several opportunities for them to explain their hopes for their children. Secondly, I could rephrase questions in person if they were not understood, as my French was not perfect and some mamas were not

comfortable with being interviewed in French. Thirdly, interviews were more suited for Batoufam than questionnaires. The village is very social. Sitting and chatting is a natural activity that I took part in with mamas informally all the time. Thus, applying a formal interview in this context worked well.

On my second day in Batoufam, on November 12, I had a meeting with my advisor, Paule Dassi, who handed me off to Mama Martine, wife of his majesty the chef of Batoufam. Little did I know it, but this was about to be a day full of data collection. Mama Martine took me from one mama to another to conduct interviews, some being wives of the chef and some being women of the village. Mamas and I sat on the steps of the chefferie and in homes. Mama Martine translated when if a woman did not feel comfortable speaking in French or if she could not understand my French. I interviewed and recorded seven mothers before my computer battery ran out. Mama Martine encouraged me to continue anyway, and I did six more interviews with a daughter of the chef as my translator when needed. However, I did not record these. Thus, they were informal. After this day of interviewing mania, I transcribed the recordings, reviewed my notes from the informal interviews, and revised my interview questions. Above all, the concept *enseigner les enfants*⁴ had been received with confusion, so I changed that question.

My next interviews were with one of my host mothers, a host aunt, and other mothers from concessions I had made contact with through a friend who was studying traditional medicine in Batoufam. These were all conducted in French, in the homes of the mothers, and recorded.

I coded interviews as I transcribed, using an Excel document to note and tally themes and phrases and words that arose often. Once all the interviews were transcribed, I reread the transcriptions and considered once again the main themes, highlighting the most common

⁴ To teach children

ones in an Excel document. I also reviewed my written observations and participant observations throughout my stay in Batoufam to code them, pulling out themes and pieces of information that applied well to my research. Combining this with the coded interview information, I began to construct answers to my research questions.

A Child In Batoufam

In traditional Bamiléké culture, children are very important. My host family in Batoufam had more than five children on average for each mother, and my host dad still wanted to have more. Kids are considered as a gift from God.⁵ Kids represent happiness, can be extra help for housework and cultivating fields, and can help parents in old age. In addition, kids could be ancestors who have died.⁶ There are many ceremonies centered around kids and their growth. From circumcision to the name ceremony to the *voir bébé*⁷, kids are very intentionally welcomed to the world and celebrated.⁸ Mothers in Cameroon traditionally want many children.⁹ In addition, Bamiléké women on average tend to have more children than the average Cameroonian woman.¹⁰ Because children are such a big part of culture, status, and happiness in Batoufam, the hopes for these children are significant.

La Reussite¹¹

Four out of ten mothers who I formally interviewed talked about *la reussite* for their children, mostly aligning this concept of success with going to school. School was the primary hope for nine out of ten mothers I interviewed and also for every mother I informally

⁵ Association pour la Rehabilitation des Valeurs Traditionnelles, L'enfant Chez les Bamiléké.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Literally "To see the baby"; an event for the extended family to see a new baby

⁸ Association pour la Rehabilitation des Valeurs Traditionnelles

⁹ Calvès, Anne-Emanuèle and Meekers, Dominique ; Statut Matrimonial Et Valeur Des Enfants Au Cameroun.

¹⁰ Tchegho, Jean-Marie ; L'Enracinement Culturel en Afrique: Une nécessité pour un développement durable (le cas des Bamiléké du Cameroun) : "The Bamiléké is defined only by their multiple groups of relationship : familial groups, neighborhood groups, village groups, diverse associations. "

¹¹ success

conversed with during my stay in Batoufam. Other common themes that came up when asked about hopes for children were independence, religious faith, retaining values, and helping family.

« *Ils vont maintenant fréquenter pour préparer le lendemain quand moi-même je serai déjà parti. Donc, le souhaite c'est seulement leur réussite. Pour prévenir leurs vies demain,* » Mama 8 explained when asked about her hopes for her children and grandchildren.¹² *Fréquenter*¹³ was used by eight of ten mothers formally interviewed, always in the sense of continuing studies at school. Without a doubt, going to school is the overwhelming hope for Batoufam mothers. Nine of ten mothers I interviewed stressed this hope. School is seen as the road to success. For Mama 4, success and school were interchangeable. She explained, « *Pour les enfants, je voudrais la réussite--oui, qu'ils fréquentent. Donc je ne veux plus qu'ils réussissent.* »¹⁴ School is also seen as the means to a job. Mama 9 explained, « *Leur avenir de demain est dans l'école. Tu ne fréquentes, tu vas faire quoi ?* ».¹⁵ Thus, going to school is very important.

When asked if Mama 9 had specific hopes for the employments of her children, she answered promptly, « *Je ne sais pas, je ne peux pas choisir parce que je ne suis pas l'enfant. C'est l'enfant qui va choisir. Les parents ne peuvent pas choisir pour l'enfant.* »¹⁶ Mama 6 had similar thoughts about the future of her child, saying, « *Ce n'est pas moi de choisir.* »¹⁷ Seven out of ten mothers I interviewed for my research did not have specific hopes for the future jobs of their children. The most important aspects of a job are to be able to nourish oneself and one's family and to be able to heal oneself and one's family when somebody falls

¹² Mama 8: "They are going to get an education now to prepare for tomorrow when myself, I will already be gone. So, the hope is just their success. To prepare their lives in the future."

¹³ To frequent, to attend

¹⁴ Mama 4: "For the children, I would like success—yes, that they would get an education. So I don't want anything more than their success."

¹⁵ Mama 9: "Their future of tomorrow is in school. If you don't get an education, you're going to do what?"

¹⁶ Mama 9: "I don't know. I cannot choose because I am not the child. It's the child who will choose. The parents cannot choose for the child."

¹⁷ Mama 6: "It's not for me to choose."

ill, according to the mamas I interviewed in Batoufam. The minority of mamas who had specific hopes for the professions of their children hoped for stable jobs in administration, teaching, medicine, and commerce. Even these women stressed, however, that the heart of the matter was being able to provide for their basic needs.

« *Si tu es même un cultivateur, c'est ton chemin que Dieu a choisi... Je peux penser que mon petit fils soit président, et alors qu'il pourra être cultivateur,* » Mama 8 said about the future profession of her grandson.¹⁸ Two themes were integrated in this quote: the lack of job specificity for a child and the importance of God. Faith was emphasized by three of ten mothers I interviewed. Two of these women were Christian and one was Muslim. All of these women regarded faith in God as more important than anything else. Mama 4 said, « *Je veux la réussite en domaine de l'école, qu'ils réussissent... Et sur tout moi, mon souhaite c'est que qu'ils suivent aussi de la religion.* »¹⁹ After talking about her hopes for her children, Mama 10 emphasized, « *On prie aussi à Dieu, parce que c'est Dieu qui décide. Voilà. Dans la Bible, on dit que l'homme est né. Quand l'homme est né, il n'est pas assez grand et dans la Bible, chacun rendre son espoir a son enfant. Tu peux accoucher un enfant comme ca mais toutes les décisions viennent de Dieu. On a beaucoup d'espoir mais on les rendre a Dieu.* »²⁰

When expressing hopes for *la réussite* of their children, three of ten mothers, unprompted, added that they want their children to succeed with integrity and to not steal. Explaining the concept of finding happiness that she hoped for her children, Mama 2 added, « *Mais que ca soit dans le bon sens d'aller à l'école, de prendre un métier... le mauvaise*

¹⁸ Mama 8: If you are even a farmer, it is the path that God has chosen... I can think that my grandson will be president, when he could be a farmer.”

¹⁹ Mama 4: “I want success in the domain of school, that they succeed... and above all, me, my hope is that they follow also religion.”

²⁰ Mama 10: “We pray also to God, because it's God who decides. There you go. In the Bible, it says that man is born. When man is born, he's not that big and in the Bible, each person has hopes for their child. You can give birth to a child but all the decisions come from God. We have lots of hopes but we give them to God.”

sens, c'est de voler. »²¹ Two other mothers I interviewed echoed this sentiment of not stealing.

While *la réussite* most often meant success in school for Batoufam mamas, it encompasses other aspects of life as well for some. Mama 3 hoped, « *que ses enfants soient un homme avec un travail et qui se marie qui aie les enfants. La réussite.* »²² Here, a mother aligned success with not only having a job, but having a family. Certainly, this is a large hope and expectation in Batoufam, so much so that I assume that it was not mentioned that much because it is considered a given future reality. When a traditional wedding took place in my host concession, all the mothers were smiling and singing and laughing, seemingly very joyful to marry off one of their daughters. Family was emphasized by five out of ten mothers in my interviews, but most often it was in the sense of grown children helping their aging parents. Three of ten mothers, unprompted, expressed their desire that their children would help them out when they get old.

In summary, mothers in Batoufam are not hoping for huge amounts of wealth for their children or a drastic change of way of life. They hope for education that will help fulfill basic needs for their children, as they work with integrity for their family as well. A study in Buea, Cameroon about the dreams of rural women also found that most mothers focused on the desire to see their children meet their basic needs.²³ Mama 3, speaking on the financial situation she hopes for for her children, said that it is not good, « *être d'irréaliste ... par rapport le moyen financier d'aujourd'hui. Parce que le bas des choses, le bas de la réussite c'est quand on met le moyen.* »²⁴ She explained that though she wants financial success for her children, that success in her opinion is simply meeting needs. Mothers in Batoufam do

²¹ Mama 2: "But that it would be in the good sense of going to school and having a profession... the bad sense is to steal."

²² Mama 3: "that her children would be a man with a job who marries and has children. Success."

²³ Barton, John, and Weinger; When Personal Dreams Derail, Rural Cameroonian Women Aspire For Their Children.

²⁴ Mama 3: "To be unrealistic... compared the financial average of today. Because the base of things, the base of success is when we meet the average."

not envision extravagance for the next generation, but as Mama 5 displays, they envision less suffering: « *Vous savez que dans les villages comme ca, il y a beaucoup de souffrance,* » she said, « *Moi, je souffre beaucoup. J'aimerais que mes enfants ne souffrent pas beaucoup comme moi, dans leurs vies.* »²⁵ In addition, Batoufam mothers do not generally have specific hopes for the professions of their children. This is not uncommon for parents worldwide. From Cameroon to the United States, parents have proved to be unable to name occupational aspirations for their kids.²⁶

Personne Ne Tombe Du Ciel²⁷

« *Quand tu es du village, tu es né dans le village, tu dois respecter la tradition. Ici c'est comme ca,* »²⁸ Mama 11 stated as a matter-of-fact. For my second research question, I was interested in the importance mothers put on preserving tradition for the next generation. The overwhelming majority of mothers who I interviewed and with whom I informally conversed in Batoufam strongly hoped that their children would preserve tradition. However, different mothers stressed different aspects of tradition. As previously explained, tradition has three different senses in Batoufam. These are traditional values, traditional events, and specifically spiritual beliefs/practices, though the three are not completely separate.

Mama 11 explained tradition as a set of values, or rules: « *Donc, la tradition je dirais quoi, il ne faut pas faire ce qu'on ne demande pas, il faut faire ce qu'on demande de faire pour l'enfant. Quand je dis a l'enfant ne touche pas, tu ne doit pas toucher. C'est ca la*

²⁵ Mama 5: "You know that in villages like this, there is a lot of suffering. Myself, I suffer a lot. I would like that my children do not suffer a lot in their lives."

²⁶ Janssen, Susan L. G.; Status Aspirations for Children: Do Parents Really Know What They Want?

²⁷ Nobody falls from the sky

²⁸ Mama 11: "When you come from the village, you are born in the village, you have to respect the tradition. Here, it's like that."

tradition. Donc tu apprends à faire ce qu'on dit à faire. »²⁹ Mama 3 echoed this concept of respecting traditional rules, hoping that, « *Si c'est interdit qu'un enfant retienne que c'est interdit. Et si ce n'est pas interdit que il retient que ce n'est pas interdit. Et que ca fait parti de la tradition.* »³⁰ She continued to explain that disrespecting elders would fall into the category of forbidden acts. Thus, this first sense of tradition mothers hope for their children to preserve has to do with rules and values, like respecting elders.

Other Mamas, like Mama 10, emphasized cultural events as tradition to be honored. « *Ici quand tu es née, voila on fait la fête, et quand tu vie encore, on program encore, on fait la fête sur toi parce que c'est toujours la tradition... Quand quelqu'un meurt ici, on l'entend et internant il y les traditions qu'on fait. Et après ca, on fait les funérailles. On organise une grande fête... On danse, il y beaucoup de sortes. Donc, la tradition,* » she finished.³¹ Three of ten mothers I interviewed stressed dances as important aspects of tradition. They talked about since they grew up with tradition and it is an important part of their life, they would like their children to also have the same experience.

Those who acknowledged specifically spiritual beliefs attached to tradition were few: two out of ten mothers I interviewed. They were both Christians, but had different opinions on traditional beliefs. For Mama 10, practicing both spiritual disciplines was preferred. « *Dans le monde, il y a les gens qui sont dans les églises qui oublient leurs traditions, ils rejettent la tradition. On va toujours faire la tradition. Même si tu es dans*

²⁹ Mama 11: "So, the tradition, what should i say. You should not do what we do not ask, you must do what we ask for a child. When I tell a child to not touch, you cannot touch. That's the tradition. So you learn to do what we tell you to do."

³⁰ Mama 3: "If it's forbidden that a child retains that it is forbidden. And if it is not forbidden that he retains that it is not forbidden. And that that is part of the tradition."

³¹ Mama 10: "Here when you are born, we celebrate and when you are still living, we plan more, we celebrate because it is still the tradition... When somebody dies here, we hear about it and there are traditions that we do. And after that, we have a funeral. We organize a huge part... We dance, there are lots of kinds. So, the tradition."

l'église, » she said.³² However, Mama 8 had a different perspective, saying, « *Les enfants même veulent déjà même refuser cette tradition la. Parce qu'ils préfèrent l'église. Ils sont plus à l'église que de faire la tradition. Si l'enfant dit que je ne suive pas la tradition, je dis tant mieux.* »³³ However, this mama was the only one who did not care too much about preserving tradition.

When asked about their preferences, no mother I interviewed hoped explicitly that their child would remain in Batoufam. In fact, three of ten mothers I interviewed stressed the importance of travel. Mama 5 saw travel as a positive thing, saying, « *Quand un enfant sort, l'enfant apprend encore les attitudes la, pour entretenir les autres. Ca change. Donc si j'avais aussi un enfant qui sorte, c'est que je suis aussi fier !* »³⁴ Mama 3 had similar thoughts, adding that travel is a must to achieve higher education. About her child, she said, « *Il faut qu'il fréquente un certain niveau et part d'ici et ce quand un enfant voyage, qu'il voit beaucoup de gens et qu'il a l'esprit développer.* »³⁵

Nevertheless, even after travel the Batoufam traditional culture is expected to remain with the child. « *Ca ne finira pas,* » Mama 9 said about tradition, « *Donc il faut que chacun préserve dans sa vie, et elle existera toujours. Ca ne pourra jamais finir, la tradition. De génération en génération, ca va toujours rester.* »³⁶ In fact, many mothers were confident that forgetting about tradition was impossible. Children are connected to their tradition like a tree is to its roots. In explaining tradition, Mama 9 said, « *Ca fait parti de la racine je veux*

³² Mama 10: "In the world, there are people who are in churches who forget their traditions, they reject the tradition. We are going to always do the tradition. Even if you are in a church."

³³ Mama 8: "The kids even want to already refuse this tradition here because they prefer the church. They are more at church than doing the tradition. If a child says that I do not follow the tradition, I say so much the better."

³⁴ Mama 5: "When a child leaves, the child learns other attitudes there, to train others. That changes things. So if I also had a child who leaves, I would also be proud!"

³⁵ Mama 3: "It is necessary that he gets to a certain level of studies and leaves here and when a child travels, that he sees a lot of people and he has the spirit to develop."

³⁶ Mama 9: "That does not finish. So it is necessary that each one preserves it in their life and it will exist forever. That can never finish, the tradition. From generation to generation, it will always stay."

dire, dans notre vie. »³⁷ In an informal interview, one mama I conversed with emphasized this by saying « *Personne ne tombe pas du ciel.* »³⁸ Everyone has a place where they come from, and you grow up there for a reason, she explained further.

Mama 11 talked about preserving specific traditional practices saying, « *Donc, même si tu parts. Quand tu meurs, on rentre encore dans ton village. C'est comme ça la tradition Bamiléké. Donc quand tu meurs, tu parts en ville, une ville autre, même si tu parts en États-Unis, on ramène ton corps, on ramène encore.* »³⁹ Mama 10 also talked about keeping up with traditional practices from abroad, explaining, « *Nous, on a la famille en France. Donc, ils n'oublient leur tradition. Quand il y a quelque chose à faire même ici, on fait ça pour eux. Ils envoient l'argent, ici au Cameroun et on fait ça pour eux.* »⁴⁰ Retaining traditional values is also stressed by mothers. Five of ten emphasized the importance of unity, specifically, as a value that cannot be lost by distance. Three out of ten brought up the telephone as a means of staying in contact. On unity and technology, Mama 8 said, « *On peut être toujours ensemble. Aujourd'hui même il y a le téléphone. Tu appelles ton frère. Demain, vous vous appelez, vous vous saluez, vous êtes dans l'ensemble.* »⁴¹

It Takes A Village

*“Le Bamiléké ne se définit que par rapport à ses multiples groups d'appartenance: groups familiaux, groups du quartier, groups du village, associations diverses.”*⁴²

³⁷ Mama 9: “That is part of the roots, I would say, in our life.”

³⁸ Mama 12: “Nobody fell from the sky.”

³⁹ Mama 11: “So, even if you leave. When you die, you come back to your village. The Bamiléké tradition is like that. So when you die, you go to the city, another city, even if you go to the United States, we bring back your body, we bring it back again.”

⁴⁰ Mama 10: “Us, we have family in France. So, they do not forget their tradition. When there is something to do even here, we do it for them. they send money to Cameroon and we do it for them.”

⁴¹ Mama 8: “We can always be together. Today, even, there is the telephone. You call your brother. Tomorrow you call each other, you greet each other, you are together.”

⁴² Tchegho, Jean-Marie : “The Bamiléké is defined only by their multiple groups of relationship : familial groups, neighborhood groups, village groups, diverse associations. ”

My third research question, asking about how mothers raise children in light of their hopes for their children's futures proved to be slightly unsuited for the Batoufam way of raising children. Traditional Batoufam child-rearing is fluid, happening day by day and moment by moment through every other person in a child's life. A well known African proverb states, "It takes a village to raise a child". In fact, the whole village does raise a child in Batouam. Thus, it is not only the mother who raises her child. A Bamiléké saying on the topic says, "*L'enfant n'est celui de sa mère que pendant la grossesse*".⁴³ Still, the mother is the first and most central educator when a child is still young. In my research I identified three main domains of education that prepare a child for the future and align with the hopes mothers have for their children: Education at home, in the community, and at school.

First, a few informal interviews I had with wives of the chef informed me of the education at the home that starts with the mother of a child. If this education goes well, it will help a child in other domains of education, like school. In formal interviews, mothers stressed teaching by example. Mama 11 expressed, « *Quand ils sont encore a la maison, quand je parts par exemple aux travailler, on part ensemble. Je les apprendre aussi parce que on sait jamais.* »⁴⁴ She continued to explain that when she went to the fields, she would take her youngest daughter with her. In observation, I saw babies on the backs of mothers doing housework and at the feet of mothers selling goods at the market. At home, child-rearing is also heavily by example. Three mothers of ten, unprompted, stressed this. Mama 3 said, « *Les enfants voient faire. Quand tu vois ton grand frère tu dis bonjour, quand tu voit ta grand sœur tu la dit bonjour.* »⁴⁵ However, two mothers talked about teaching by explicitly speaking to children about how life works in Batoufam and at the chefferie, and telling stories of ancestors. In observation at my host concession, my siblings would be both instructed or

⁴³ Tchegho: "The child is only his mother's during pregnancy."

⁴⁴ Mama 11: "When they are still at home, when I leave for example to work, we leave together. I teach them also because we never know."

⁴⁵ Mama 3: "Children see how to do things. When you see your older brother you say good morning, when you see your older sister you tell her good morning."

taught with words and they would copy actions that their mothers did. For example, my little host brother would be told to eat all of his food and my little host sisters would sweep sometimes just for fun, without being told to, because they had learned from watching their mothers.

« À les enseigner, c'est rester calme, ne pas garder les soucis dans le cœur, apprendre à pardonner, apprendre à donner à ceux qui n'ont pas, rester dans l'entente, ne pas détacher, rester ensemble. S'entendre. Parce que si on s'entend, il n'y a plus de problème, » Mama 3 concluded.⁴⁶ Mamas want to teach many values to their children. Three of ten mothers stressed the teaching of sharing. Through observation and participant observation, I learned that sharing is very important in Batoufam. I saw people sharing food all the time, and began to embrace this aspect of the culture. When I shared oranges that I had bought at the market with Mamas I met on the road, it felt like an exchange of love. They gave me onions from their fields or peanuts, and called me their daughters. Sharing at home was expected as well. When one mother was caring for a sick child, her other children ate with another mother. Sharing is a value that mothers hope and expect their children to keep in the future. Respect is also a very important value to teach to kids. « On apprend le respect à l'enfant. Le respect, oui oui, c'est la première chose, » Mama 2 said.⁴⁷ Respect is shown poignantly through greetings. In Batoufam, I observed and participated in greeting every person in sight. Women are greeted and called “Mama” while men are called “Papa”. This is a sign of respect, and I learned that everyone is considered a future mother or father. Other ways children are taught to respect people include standing up when the father arrives, bowing to the chef, and sitting properly with legs straight and uncrossed in front of oneself.

⁴⁶ Mama 3: “To teach them, it’s to stay calm, to not keep worries in the heart, to learn to forgive, to learn to give to those who do not have, to get along, to not detach, to stay together. To get along. Because if we get along, there is not a problem anymore.

⁴⁷ Mama 2: “We teach respect to a child. Respect, yes yes, that is the first thing.”

When asked how they teach their children or raise their children, three of ten mothers seemed confused. They would ask me to rephrase the question. Others, like Mama 8 and Mama 4, just explained what they do for their children. Mama 8 for example, replied, « *Pour élever mes enfants, je suis d'abord cultivatrice. Donc, quand je parts aux champs, je trouve ce que je trouve. Je viens, je prépare, je les nourrie. Même si il n'y a pas l'huile. Je peux vendre ce que j'ai récolté pour acheter ce que je manque. Uh-huh. C'est comme ça qu'on fait.* »⁴⁸ This, along with observation in my home concession, led me to conclude that the concept of teaching children is not intentionally thought about often in Batoufam. Rather, child-rearing is a natural and daily process that happens through many people.

Secondly, this brings us to education in the community. As previously explained, all women are called “Mama”. They also take the role of a mother for any child. My host sister, a teenager, talked with me about living in a polygamist family. About her many mothers, she said, « *Elles sont tous mes mamas.* »⁴⁹ I observed that any mother in the concession could ask a child to do something no matter if they were the birth mother or not. When I asked Mama 11 how many children she had, she asked for clarification because she did not know whether to count all of the kids in her polygamist concession or just the ones she birthed.⁵⁰ Though she birthed only four, many more kids than that would hang around in her kitchen when I visited her. Indeed, not only other females raise the children of Batoufam, but males do too. At the evangelical church of Chila, the children’s Sunday school was headed by a young man who led the seventy-plus kids in chants and songs and prayers.

Thirdly, there is education at school, which was emphasized by nine out of ten mothers I interviewed. While the education at the home and education in the community were concluded by interview analysis and heavy observation, this formal education was what most

⁴⁸ Mama 8: “To raise my kids, I am first a farmer. So, when I go to the fields, I find what I find. I come, I prepare, I feed them. even if there is no oil. I can sell what I harvest to buy what I lack. Uh-huh. It’s like that what we do.”

⁴⁹ Sister 1: “They are all my mothers.”

⁵⁰ Mama 11

mothers identified as *enseignement*⁵¹. Mothers attested to encouraging their children in this hope in several different ways. Two of ten mothers talked about nourishing their children so that they could do their school work well. One talked about looking over their homework. From observation, I concluded that the biggest way mothers encourage their children to get an education is actually sending their children to school. At the evangelical church of Chila, the pastor prayed for the mothers who suffer to send their children to school.⁵² At a tontine meeting in Batoufam before deciding on ISP, I learned that what mothers spend their money on is mostly school fees.⁵³ Thus, mothers support their children financially to achieve their hopes of a good education for the next generation.

⁵¹ Teaching

⁵² La Paroisse de Chila, L'église evangelique du Cameroun, November 15, 2015.

⁵³ Tontine meeting at the Batoufam chefferie, October 26, 2015

Conclusion

My hypothesis about child-rearing happening through actions and words had reason to it, but the question in the first place, which inquired specifically into mothering, was not entirely suited for Batoufam's communal way of life, where everyone has the responsibility to raise the children of their community. Regarding my first two hypothesis dealing with the hopes of mothers and opinions on tradition, I was on the right track from the beginning. Mothers in Batoufam do want their children to go to school and get a job while preserving tradition. They have relatively simple dreams for their children that grow out of general expectations of traditional culture in the village. Their hopes do not surpass traditional roots or do away with the current way of life. Rather, hopes for the next generation center around the means to maintain what Batoufam believes life is all about: people. Desires of mothers for their children's education and employment are grounded in the desire that their family can heal from sickness and be fed. Essentially, they desire their families to live, and living well for these mothers does not necessarily mean surpassing basic needs with extravagant wealth.

Batoufam mothers tend to speak about tradition as a set of values or rules that everyone has instilled in them from infancy, various cultural events, or a spiritual belief. In any case, they see their children as small trees that grow out of this tradition. It is the history and substance of Batoufam, where they grow up. Raising children happens within this context, where kids learn by example and verbally. Above all, mothers teach the values of sharing and staying in unity.

Tradition saturates every part of their early lives, nourishing and strengthening their roots. As they grow up, mothers have no desire that they stay a little tree, close to the ground where the roots are. Children cannot be stunted, they must grow! As the branches of trees elongate, so will the reaches of Batoufam children. They are encouraged to learn, to travel, to seek out other ideas and attitudes and ways of life. They are raised to work hard whatever

they may do, and to thank God for whatever means they have to take care of their family and themselves.

Still, the symbolism goes further than birth and growing up. When a tree grows taller than men, something we cannot see with the naked eye is how its roots have grown deeper in perfect proportion. In this way, Batoufam mothers rarely have worries about their children forgetting whatever aspects they value of tradition or traditional culture. There is no way that a tree's roots will fall off. Being "rooted" essentially means that one is planted firm. Thus, the hopes of mothers are for deep roots and tall branches, and strength at both ends.

Implications for development and further study

If the goal for development is a better tomorrow and rural Cameroonian children of tomorrow are going to be both rooted in traditional culture, and branching out to see what else the world has for them, then Cameroon's development must be both rooted and modernizing as well. This means that development solutions need to come from developing countries themselves. In addition, development solutions must be specifically suited to work within cultural and traditional contexts and preserve that which is not inhibiting development. This can certainly give a new face to modernism, instead of attributing it only to Westernization. Further study of these implications is very important for the direction and meaning of development. First of all, hopes of young adults from rural villages would be a good study to see if the hopes of mothers are truly influential for the next generation. Secondly, the relationship between development plans by either governments or organizations and a community's felt loss of traditional culture would be an important study.

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Appendixes:**A. Primary Resources**

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B. Interview Questions

First Set :

1. *Vous vous appelez comment ?*
2. *Votre profession, c'est quoi ?*
3. *Vous avez combien d'enfants ?*
4. *Ils ont quels âges ?*
5. *Qu'est-ce que vous voulez pour vos enfants ?*
 - a. Often rephrased for understanding : *Quels espoirs avez-vous pour vos enfants ?*
 - b. For those with grown children : *Quand vos enfants étaient petits, qu'est-ce que vous avez voulu pour eux ?*
6. *Est-ce que vous avez les espoirs spécifiques pour leurs métiers ?*
7. *Qu'est-ce que vous voulez enseigner aux enfants ?*
8. *Comment est-ce que vous enseignez les enfants ?*
9. *Quelles valeurs sont importantes pour les enfants à apprendre ?*
10. *Quel type de personne voulez-vous que vos enfants soient ?*
11. *Quels aspects de la vie traditionnelle sont importants à préserver pour la prochaine génération ?*
12. *Quels changements voulez-vous dans les vies de vos enfants par rapport la vie d'aujourd'hui ?*
13. *Comme je vais faire un livre pour les enfants, qu'est-ce que vous voulez dans ce livre ?*
 - a. Often added : *Quel type d'histoire, peut-être ?*

Revised Set :

1. *Vous vous appelez comment ?*
2. *Votre profession, c'est quoi ?*
3. *Vous avez combien d'enfants ?*
4. *Ils ont quels âges ?*
5. *Quels espoirs avez-vous pour vos enfants ?*
 - a. For those with grown children : *Quand vos enfants étaient petits, qu'est-ce que vous avez voulu pour eux ?*
6. *Avez-vous les espoirs spécifiques pour leurs métiers ?*
7. *Quel type de personne voulez-vous que vos enfants deviennent ?*
8. *Comment est-ce que vous élever vos enfants ?*
9. *Qu'est-ce que vous apprenez aux enfants à la maison ?*
10. *Quelles valeurs sont importantes à apprendre aux enfants ?*
11. *Pour la prochaine génération, est-ce que la tradition du village est importante à préserver ?*
12. *Pourquoi ?*
13. *Quels aspects de la tradition sont importants pour les enfants à préserver à la future ?*
14. *Vous avez les soucis que vos enfants ne vont pas préserver la culture traditionnelle ?*
15. *Qu'est-ce que vous voulez dans un livre pour les enfants ?*