Navigating the urban landscapes of uncertainty and human anchorage: girl migrants in N'Djamena

30-08-08
Mphil Thesis African Studies
University of leiden/ Africa Studies Centre
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Abstract
The capital of Chad can be best described as the place where the countries insecurity and possibilities interact in enlarged and specific forms. N’Djamena is a very specific urban landscape to its residents. The capital in the last years has been the stage to a number of coup-attempts. Corruption, seizure, everyday violence and livelihood insecurity shape and are being shaped by its different inhabitants in different ways. N’Djamena is a city that is characterized by what could be seen as a religious divide, a city in which people of different ethnic groups tend to approach each other based on historical and contemporary hurts and competition. It is a city in which the displacement of houses, traders and market women form a daily “governmental” threat, a city in which military forces influence street life. It is also a city in which people create alliances daily and try to make things work. To understand the interaction between such a specific social-political environment and girls and young women -internal migrants and refugees- living in this environment, this thesis explores the room for manoeuvre of the research groups in the urban landscape. The closeness of peers in very specific ways seems to have been of underestimated value in studies of young female migrants so far. The importance of this type of human anchorage goes beyond the economical rationale of access to resources but tries to encapsulate the needs for human affection, closeness, trust and loyalty as essential for the wellbeing of girls in the African urban context. Another very important aspect of navigation is how especially girls deal with the geographies of exclusion and inclusion, the historical divisions in Chad between north and south, Christian and Muslim and how they more often than the generation of their parents cross borders between different spheres in town. In the process they seem to appropriate veils and the Arabic language for their own economic mobility and/or inclusion in village modernity.
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Acknowledgments

Guendengao (Nicole) Konaye, close friend, research assistant, translator and partner in crime…this thesis owes tremendously to your social and animating skills. The adventures we undertook to explore the field were unforgettable. Likewise was your friendship and the support of your family. Besides Nicole, all informants: girls, young women, brothers, elders, that were willing to share their stories and perceptions with us deserve a big thank you here. A special thanks needs to go to Girimaji, Boricet, Merci, Félicité, Rosine, King, Dono, Sidonie, Victorie and friends and in particular Chef Jacques Ngarasta Ngargoto. If it were not for all of your experiences and stories and your openness to me as a stranger, this research could never have been done. I hope you recognize and feel comfortable with the end-product.

For the fieldwork period I am very thankful for the help and support of Professor Khalil Aliou (Université de N’Djamena), Mrs. Angèle Beguy (CEFOD), Mr. Ngargos Nadjiara Beguy (ATPFED: Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion des Femmes et des Enfants Déshérité), Félix Naham and Sidonie (Amasot), Neloumta (Amastot, Mongo), Salma Khalil Aliou, Mrs Lawrence and Pastor Abe Raymond (Justice et Paix). The staff of the Cooperation Suisse in Bedigrui, Pastor Bolngar Domtitet
and his wife Madeleine Domtinet (FAFED: Fondation d’Amour pour la formation d’Enfants en Détresse), Mrs Celestine, Mr. Djí and Mrs Hawa at ASTBEF, Mrs Dangar (sociologist at CELIAF), the community chiefs of the Mingaame, Bilala, Kouka, Nderguigui, Dono Manga and Péri peoples in N’Djamena. In Mongo: Geeske Zijp, Abdoulaye Baine, and Abdel Djelil, Fatouma and her sister.

Abakar, Djibrine, Christian, Chantal, Tahir and Eric, thank you for making living in N’djamena pleasant.

I am indebted to Mirjam de Bruijn who supported this research from the first brainstorm on and gave me the academic, but more importantly the personal confidence to undertake it. Thank you for bringing me into contact with Nicole so that I had the best start of research ever. Thank you for being an inspiration and being patient. Marlou Schrover thank you for investing time and energy in this project and for the critical remarks that helped me sharpen my work. Thank you for sharing your expertise on the topics this research touches upon.

Han van Dijk, Robert Ross, Rijk van Dijk, Daniela Merolla and Nakar Ndjindil, thank you for the academic dialogue during the research or writing process.

This research could not have been possible without the financial support of LUF, Outbound Study Grant and Dr. Hendrik Muller Vaderlandsch Fonds.

A final big thank you needs to go to my parents, Piet and Margriet Both, for introducing us all to Africa. (Bawku, Ghana) To Marieke, Rosalijn, Pieter and Emmelie for all their support and understanding. To Rosalijn for advising me on the text-level. To my grandmothers and close friends who had to do without me for quite sometime, first while I was in Chad, secondly when I was stuck to the computer the rest of the year. I hope to make it up to all of you soon. A special thanks needs to go to Hilde Kroes for all the discussions over coffee during the Mphil and especially during the thesis-writing process. You were a great support. At times a colleague, a coach, an editor but most of all good friend who stuck by my side when I lost it and who laughed with me when we both lost it...........

Leiden 28th of August 2008
1. Introduction

“You should see the Rue de Quarante metre at seven in the morning….the roads are full of them. It is a social problem that occupies us a lot, but we don’t arrive at solving it…………”1 (general comment)

In the morning the large city axes of N’Djamena are crowded with young Chadians as they leave the peripheral quarters of town they live in moving en masse towards the central and northern (predominantly Muslim) parts of town to work2. In the evening this movement goes in opposite direction. The youth come from villages in Southern Chad and for the larger part their jobs fall within the domestic sphere. The youngest among them are around ten years old. Although more than fifty percent are boys, the presence of girls in this movement generates a lot of attention, especially since some of them are “still very young girls but walk with babies on their back”3. When I introduced myself and the topic of my research in N’Djamena to different kinds of informants and NGO’s, people often immediately referred to the visible movement of these girls and stated their urban presence as problematic: as a social problem that demanded a solution.

I had come to study the mobility of girls in Chad towards N’Djamena, the capital, and had decided on this research for two reasons. Firstly Chad became known to me4 as a country in which mobility has an explanatory function in capturing the way people cope with prevailing uncertainties.

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1 A comment I encountered when introducing the topic of research to Chadian friends, informants and people working for NGO’s. I have translated their comment from French, as consecutively most quotes will be translated from French to English completely. Sometimes I have chosen to use certain words in French: when they are very common expressions or have a specific meaning that is difficult to translate to English without loosing some of its content.

2 By the public they are often referred to cynically as les fonctionnaires de Rue de Quarante, or the civil servants of the rue de quarante. This road forms one of the cores of what can be described as the Muslim part of N’Djamena, the quarters Klemat and Diguel start at the north of this road.

3 Like the citation this chapter started with a very often heard comment in N’Djamena.

4 During fieldwork in the town of Mongo in January-March 2006 for my bachelor thesis, and afterwards in preparation for this thesis in discussing issues in Chad with my current supervisor Prof. dr. Mirjam de Bruijn.
Touched by slave raiding, civil war, recurring droughts, international conflict, poverty and local, endemic insecurity in the last two centuries, Chad is a country in which insecurity is prevalent. Uncertainty should perhaps be dominant to the analysis of the way people negotiate a living in this country. Mobility can be seen as a way people enact on this uncertainty as well as how they enact on chances and possibilities, as the way people in Chad have developed strategies to deal with insecurity, the scarcity of resources and the dreams of modernity and development. How this requirement of mobility (or movement: Simone 2003) has affected the younger generations in Chad has hardly been studied. Its impact should be expected to differ per region, family and individual. Girls are likely to be described as victims in such a country; as vulnerable to foster-care constructions in which they pull the shortest string in damaged family-structures, as vulnerable to trafficking and at the place of arrival seen as easy preys to (sexual) exploitation. Therefore I became interested to study their mobility in such a specific country: to understand their participation in the dynamics of uncertainty and possibility described above.

Secondly my focus was on the dynamics of an intriguing city full of contradictions. The capital of Chad can be best described as the place where the country's insecurity and possibilities interact in enlarged and specific forms. African cities more often are described as the locus of creativity and uncertainty at the same time and this ambiguity makes them very volatile places. (Simone 2003, Mbembe & Nuttal 2004, Waage 2006). N’Djamena is a very specific urban landscape to its residents. The capital has in the last years been stage to quite a number of coup-attempts. Corruption, seizure, everyday violence and livelihood insecurity shape and are being shaped by its different inhabitants in different ways. N’Djamena is a city that is characterized by what could be seen as a religious divide, a city in which people of different ethnic groups tend to approach each other based on historical and contemporary hurts and competition. It is a city in which the displacement of houses, traders and market women form a daily “governmental” threat, a city in which military forces, both Chadian and French, influence street life. It is also a city in which people create alliances daily and do not give up laughing and try to make things work. To understand such specific interaction between a social-political environment and a part of its inhabitants I have formulated the following research question central to this thesis:

*How do migrant-girls and young women inhabit and navigate the volatile, uncertain urban landscape of Chad’s capital N’Djamena?*

This research question is significant because firstly it addresses a gap in our knowledge on girls and young women in Chad and N’Djamena as little has been published about them. Even more in general we can say that the focus on male urban youth in Africa is prevailing while little literature

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6 This research is based on a specific selection of girls and young women however and does not claim, nor aim to represent all girls and young women in N’Djamena.
exists on the participation of female youth in urban mobility. Secondly the focus on this specific group in interaction with an uncertain environment gives more insight to the complex interplay of agency and structure in a very particular setting. The research will contribute to a more refined understanding of the interaction of girls and young women with uncertain and ever changing environments beyond the dominant victimizing and homogenizing discourses on (migrant-) girls and young women in African countries.

**Trajectories**

There would be a quite a lot of pathways of mobile girls that could be studied in N’Djamena. Researching all these possible types of trajectories would have been an impossible task, but the following gives and idea of the larger spectrum of the mobility of girls and young women in N’Djamena. One can find northern girls trying to make it to Saudi Arabia, mostly under the cover of going to Mecca for the Hajj. They risk to be sent back to N’Djamena in full airplanes, only to try to make it to Saudi Arabia again. *Kouka* girls -from around the town of Ati, Centre-East of Chad- are also known as highly mobile though their migration to town (Mongo or N’Djamena) is often seasonal. Originally *Kouka* women and girls were associated with seasonal domestic work in N’Djamena, but some claim that due to the large influx of southern girls they are pushed more and more out of their initial jobs and are more active in petty trade and prostitution. *Migaame* girls -from the Guéra, central Chad- are much more likely to come to N’Djamena for educational or marriage purposes. Young students from all over Chad try to go abroad to study and abroad trained jobless young women in N’Djamena now try their luck in Abeche: a fast growing town due to the large amount of humanitarian-aid organizations present there. Young, unmarried, educated women in town expressed their wish to take care of one of their brothers’ daughters, to fulfil a self-defined moral and feminine duty of bringing up a child properly. They were in the position to offer them education in town; as single women they could also well use an extra hand in their household. One of them had her own child at a young age and her mother took care of her daughter so she could proceed schooling at that time. Another woman had been placed with an aunt during childhood. The aunt was unable to have any children and expressed the wish to the girl’s mother to take her in. The sister could not refuse this demand although she only had one daughter herself; there was only one girl in her own household. Although the girl felt lonely sometimes after school when she came home alone, she was taken care of very well -materially and emotionally- in her aunt’s household. People still think my mother has died because my aunt died a few years ago. They think I was her daughter. At the funeral I was dressed completely in white as if she were my mother”.

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7 And we can ask ourselves if female youth even exists in environments like these.
8 These humanitarian NGO’s arrived in 2003 as a consequence of a large influx of refugees of Darfur (Sudan) fleeing to the East of Chad and the regional problems that arose for Internally Displaced People from Chad.
9 Informal conversation with H. November 2007
Clearly then, being a girl and experiencing mobility are not necessarily contradictory phases in Chad.\textsuperscript{10} Neither are the experiences of the girls and young women studied in this research unique. The experience of being a girl is closely related to mobility in-between households and classificatory parents. Their mobility in-between towns and in-between countries often follows the rhythms of funerals and weddings\textsuperscript{11} and fits within cultural accepted and expected behaviour of kin, usually labelled fosterage. Although all these forms of mobility are not unique to Chad they are embedded in specific local circumstances and triggered by specific aspirations that should be understood to comprehend their meanings.

"Under Habré there was no democracy. Nobody came here (N’Djamena). Now it is democracy and devaluation, everything is expensive, so we come to manage here......" (Gua, 19 years old)\textsuperscript{12}

The girls and young women this specific research is focused on come from different backgrounds but can be roughly divided in three different groups. The youngest link their mobility to the democracy of Déby, having created an environment in which it is now safe to travel to N’Djamena from the South. It might be an ironic statement to all Chadians and outsiders that see democracy as a failed project in Chad. But in terms of travel-possibilities and local security things have improved in the South of Chad in the last decade, which means girls can now travel by public transport to the capital quite safely.\textsuperscript{13} Besides that, the statement also has a more cynical aspect to it: the type of democracy president Déby has created in Chad, means the resources of the state move to the hands of his close affiliates foremost. It are his kin and those others he maintains reciprocate relations with -such as traders- that especially possess the means to employ more than one southern youngster in their households. Girls from the age of 11 now partake in the ‘exode rurale des filles’, according to the media, public opinion and NGO’s. Their coming \textit{en masse} to work in N’Djamena in Chad is -unlike elsewhere\textsuperscript{14}- a relatively recent type of mobility for girls from the countryside. From this perspective this ‘group’ of girls was very interesting to work with.\textsuperscript{15} They formed a relatively visible group defined as a social problem. Within this ‘group’ a lot of diversity was found however. But there were more girls and young women in N’Djamena that arrived alone and found their way in town. In the process of looking for different groups it proved difficult to find those that did not fall within the

\textsuperscript{10} And this could be said equally for a lot of other countries.
\textsuperscript{11} Traditional occasions that would allow for an adult to bring or take a child to relatives in town, or to the countryside.
\textsuperscript{12} All names of informants have been changed for reasons of their privacy.
\textsuperscript{13} Although there is augmenting reference to a ‘growing’ conflict between cattle herders and farmers in the South since the last 15 years: see chapter 4.
\textsuperscript{14} There are many studies of these types of exodus for other areas ranging from Europe (Moch 1993) to the rest of the world (Ouedraogo 1995, Bastia 2005, Moya 2007) that analyze such dynamics as historical and less recent phenomena.
\textsuperscript{15} In the same trajectory a lot of boys were mobile and where possible we spoke with them as well. The general assumption is that they started this movement from the countryside to town to do domestic work. The movement of young girls was described as more recent and able to stir quite some public debate.
classic paradigm of female migrants ending up in either domestic work or prostitution.\textsuperscript{16} While looking hard for a more holistic approach to young female mobility in this exploratory research, through an intermediary one day I ended up in a bar with girls and women from the Central African Republic. All of them had arrived in N’Djamena in specific ways as a consequence of unrest in Bangui, the capital of the Central African Republic in 2003. Their concentration as ‘foreigners’ in Kabalaye\textsuperscript{17}, their sense of being a group and their eagerness to tell their stories made me very interested to work with them. Through an acquaintance a few girls from small towns in the South of Chad (Kelo and Laï) that grouped in N’Djamena entered the research as well, their daily activities, just like those of the women of the Central African Republic laid within prostitution, going out with boyfriends for money, hair breading and the trade of alcohol, boiled eggs and soap. Although the young women in these last two ‘categories’ were a little older than the young southern girls working in domestics, they were by society still classified as girls, as they were single and going out with men as filles-libres. Being unmarried and most of them without children, they still belonged to the social group of ‘girls’ in society most of the time.

There are commonalities and differences between these different groups of girls and young women that reveal issues of importance when studying the mobility of girls. The biggest commonality is the way they seek to navigate through the specific urban landscapes that characterize N’Djamena that in simplified terms is made up of a North and a South\textsuperscript{18}. At the same time they have in common their strategies of survival, their creativity and sometimes inability in navigating within the urban landscape and the way their professions and social positions classify them as girls. (domestiques, fille-libres, fille-mères even though they might be mothers, married or divorced) Their professions also put them at the heart of the cities dichotomies, as such that they are required to be especially mobile and creative with the cities diversity. They either literary confront urban boundaries, or do so in the imagery. (See chapter 5) The main objective of this research was to hear their own story, not their lives formulated by others. The study does not assume however, that girls can be studied on their own, without reference to parents, brothers, boyfriends etc. Attention will be paid to their perspectives and input, yet primarily this study aims to study a type of social navigation from a position informed by their own age and gender. Girls and young women and their pathways themselves show a great variety however and a kaleidoscopic reality should be expected.

\textsuperscript{16} Although prostitution is a complex concept and was sometimes by my informants easily exchanged as a profession for trading activities as an income generating activity.
\textsuperscript{17} Le quartier Chaud or the hot quarter of N’Djamena as the inhabitants of N’Djamena refer to it, were bars and prostitutes determine the scenery.
\textsuperscript{18} Referring to a cultural, religious divide between a Arabic-Muslim Northern and a Christian/ ANimistic Southern Chad that has been reinforced in N’Djamena since 1979. See chapter 4.
Chapters and themes

Theoretically in this thesis, different points of interest come together; as the aim is to examine how to understand a city with its very specific characteristic and the position and mobility within it of young female new-comers. In the interaction we need to find out how both city and girls shape each other and thus how structure and agency should be understood in this particular setting. Examining their urban mobility as a type of navigation (Vigh 2006, Utas 2005) offers the possibility to understand the fine dynamics of changing social positions of girls and young women, during time and through specific social-political and economical landscapes. The empirical data on the particular research groups furthermore points towards several important foci to understand their urban navigation in N'Djamena. Notions of appropriation, social anchorage through same age- same sex peer groups and the way girls are linked to classificatory parents in the context of N'Djamena are the most important points of analysis that will be taken up in the theoretical chapter, chapter two.

The third chapter on methodology will elaborate on the process of research, the approaches chosen and which of these were achievable, the difficulties of doing research in N'Djamena, multi-sited research and the (in-) effectiveness of group-interviews. The young girls often presented themselves in small groups and in the villages in Southern Chad large village groups gathered when we came to learn about the mobility of their girls. This way of working had its own positive and negative sides to it. Partly this research can be described as street or urban ethnography. Endlessly walking around and waiting for people, observing and participating in aspects of everyday public-life, experiencing its tensions, contradictions, solidarities and alliances became very important research data.

With the fourth chapter the analytical part of the thesis starts. This chapter will analyse the period in which the girls and young women have grown up in Chad and how history has influenced the (urban) landscapes they are currently navigating through. The chapter will also elaborate on some changing features of girlhood and on the contemporary positions of women in Chad more in general through the way girls and their mothers or older sisters explained their positions themselves.

The fifth chapter will be on appropriation and the way girls seek to inhabit the urban landscape. They do this in very specific ways and some would say they do this severely confined within the cities social political and religious structures. But to not study these aspects of urban navigation is to miss out on how girls negotiate access and what they aim for in town. Girls develop own ways of dealing with the differences in urban landscapes and are active physical and cultural border crossers in this specific setting.

In the sixth chapter there will be a focus on their small social networks in town. This part of the thesis pays attention to important dynamics of peer-groups; girls of the same age in town forming each others safety nets. Although the focus on peer-networks in town is far from new to the study of migration, there has been little attention for same-age children/adolescents grouping in town,
because they are likely to be considered unimportant due to their presumed lack of social and economical capital.

The role of adults in the migration of youngsters will be examined in the seventh chapter. The way community chiefs in N’Djamena feel involved with their mobile youth is interesting and shows how dependency on adults is inherent to the unpredictability of urban life for girls. It also shows how and for which reasons contact with adults is sought, not working or avoided by girls. It elaborates on the burden for involved community-leaders and their wishes and initiatives towards maintaining more youth in their villages. The thesis will be concluded in chapter eight.
2. Navigating girls and young women in N'Djamena

(Urban) Landscapes, Human Anchorage and Appropriation

Introduction
How do girls and young women that have migrated to N'Djamena confront and how are they confronted with the structures of the specific urban environment? This research is an attempt to understand the restricted as well as the given and created room for manoeuvre for girls in the city. The restricting and threatening structures that so undeniably form part of everyday live in many African settings and the position of children and youth therein is being investigated more and more. (cf. De Boeck & Honwana 2005, Christiansen 2006) Nevertheless most of this contemporary literature on these processes is biased towards male youth. (cf. Biaya 2005) In this thesis the concept of navigation is used to investigate the interplay of such structures with girls and young women. Navigation asks for an understanding of actors and landscapes and therewith lends itself especially well to analyse the interplay between both and the volatility that characterizes the shifting social positions of girls versus the ever changing environments.

Cities are never neutral sceneries but can be viewed as composed of layers of landscapes, landscapes in which political, economic, social and religious power-contests take place on a daily basis. Cities can be seen as the product of “accelerated, extended and intensified intersections of bodies, landscapes, objects and technologies”. (Simone 2004: 408) How this interaction takes place will be central to this thesis. The concept of navigation will be used as the way to understand the interaction between uncertain landscapes and ‘newcomers’-girls and young women- in town. Besides an exploration of the concept of navigation, this chapter needs elaboration on how to see and study girls and young women and how the urban landscapes can be understood and distinguished.
Furthermore -because of their centrality to the interaction in town between these specific agents and 
structures- and therewith to understanding navigation, in this chapter three central themes will be 
explored. Their value to understanding the specific types of navigation girls and young women in 
this research practice, stem from the empirical data. They will be explored consecutively as the 
landscapes of affection and solidarity -in which peers, parents and loose ties in town come to stage-
and secondly the process of appropriation. Appropriation refers to the making one's own the 
meanings and use of urban landscapes and the restrictions that lie herein for girls and young women. 
These themes then will be related to the larger urban landscape of uncertainty and volatility as 
N'Djamena is best described. To start with however, a theoretical concern on representation will be 
raised.

A theoretical concern
While in such research an understanding of girls and cities is needed, it is sometimes difficult to do 
justice to the representation of them. Any type of research on people as part of urban and rural 
fluidity and geographical and social velocity in contemporary Africa risks to be written down in 
over simplification and to be analysed through the researchers own path-dependent epistemological 
and analytical glasses. Familiar concepts might not be challenged but projected onto new and ever 
changing situations in the city in order to make that what happens comprehensive to the stranger. In 
this process a ”thinning of the social” is a realistic analytical abyss one should aim to avoid when 
analysing social groups in unknown and ever-changing settings. (Mbembe 2004: 349)

The thinning of the social seems specifically practised when doing research on migrant girls 
and young women in cities. Girl migrants are often seen as extremely vulnerable domestic workers, 
ambulant vendors or prostitutes, while the societies they are born into, and move in and out of in the 
process of migration are described as unkind and full of discrimination and inequality. If society is 
violent and uncertain this will affect practically all other people in the same context as well, though 
this comparison is often left out of sight when girl migrants are studied. While recently there has 
been a tendency to stress the capacity and creativity of urban youth in Africa, this urban youth did 
often not include girls. (Whyte 2006, Thorsen2007b) It should be seen as a deficiency that not more 
attention is paid to urban coping by girls and young women as their ways are closely related to 
specific urban landscapes. The danger of such an approach however still would be a thinning of the 
social, in which urban (female) youth in this case would easily be described as inventive heroes 
instead of victims to react to the first discourse. It is very unlikely that such a one-side picture 
coincides with reality and the study of girl-migrants in urban environments asks for a focus on 
diversity, a variety of positions vis a vis the urban challenges specific to a certain town and society 
and attention for changing experiences and abilities during the span of a certain period. Furthermore 
the difference between girls needs to be emphasized, for girls are too often incorrectly portrayed as a
homogeneous group, while diversity belongs as much to this social category as to others. (Aapola 2005: Introduction).

Thus, rather than to see vulnerability as a predicament to the fate of girls in underdeveloped societies, this thesis aims to show the differences in trajectories. Agency vis a vis specific urban conditions might be gradually developed but does not necessarily develop linearly. Analytically this research proposes to analyse what can be called the missing perspectives on girl migrants in town, through their diversity of experience and their very specific ways of navigation. The following research question is central to this thesis:

How do migrant-girls and young women inhabit and navigate the volatile, uncertain urban landscape of Chad’s capital N’Djamena? On a more abstract level this analysis asks whether we need new ways to look at the urban navigations of girls and the specific spaces they own/ appropriate and are marginal to in the specific landscapes of a city.

The focus will be on thick data, not with the aim to seduce the reader with case studies but to stress the multiple experiences of migrant girls in the urban setting and thus to prevent the “thinning of the social”. (Mbembe 2004: 349)

A specific focus: girls and young women in Africa
There has recently been some attention for youth in Africa and new theoretical points of departure in the study of youth. Youth in uncertain environments prevail in this new literature within which youth is predominantly male, highly creative (though constrained by circumstances: Abdumaliq Simon 2006) and actively seeking/ navigating their way to adulthood in ‘bildungsroman-style’: “a formula of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries characterized by challenge, crisis and resolution”. (Durham 2008: 8) Young people are studied for their participation in reshaping societies, for their protest to conventional traditions and for their ability to create (new) culture(s). The girls and young women in this research in N’Djamena only to a modest extend can be seen as the creative procreators of society and culture however. Perhaps that means we are dealing with one of the gender-differences when it comes to ‘youth in Africa’ as something still understudied. (Whyte 2006, Thorsen 2007) Yet one could also be inclined to believe that there are a lot more nuances the study of youth should take into consideration. First of all to not paint the heroic picture of African youth as procreators of culture even under the most difficult circumstances, but on the differentiation between and on small scale negotiations of space and freedom and aspiring that seem more realistic. The girls in this research navigate foremost between survival and aspirations, between uncertainty and human anchorage, between appropriation and adaptation.

Writing about young girls in changing societies is often a problematic and confusing undertaking for the researcher. Problematic for we need to define who we regard as girls/ or when

girls and young women see themselves as belonging to either one of these categories. More attention will be paid to this in chapter four based on emic perspectives on the differences between girls and women. Confusing because one is likely to encounter a large diversity of stories, of a group we often see as equally marginalized and therefore assume they are facing more or less the same challenges. In general girls in ‘third world countries’ are described and treated in terms of discrimination and exploitation or are medicalized. An inquiry in N’djamena’s library catalogue (CEFOD) for example gives an interesting summary of how girls in developing countries have come to the public surface in the last decades: the literature in which girls figure moves from a concern with circumcision towards a concern about HIV and Aids, pregnancies, exploitation at the home and finally girls as under-represented in educational systems. Van Beers (1994) already discerned this focus in the literature and superficiality and paucity in qualitative research on girls when he wrote a broad literature review. Besides these ‘development’-inquiries and concerns the overall assumption is that girls are deemed especially vulnerable in a society ruled by insecurities like Chadian society. The idea of vulnerable girls originates for a large part from ascribing risks to girl-identity in many cultures, or by outside monitors and NGO’s. But girls partake in many challenging trajectories of mobility and seem to remain to do so. To understand these movements in the complex setting of N’Djamena, a town in which anyone will have to encounter a large scale of challenges and restrictions it is then necessary to move beyond the discourses of vulnerability to gain a more holistic understanding of what is taking place. Instead of falling into dual representation of girls and young women as either strong and powerful or as vulnerable and at risk (Aapola 2005:11) a more sophisticated perspective is needed, as such a dichotomy does not always reflect the multiple positions girls occupy in society and their local environments. (ibid.) Furthermore an emphasis on differentiation is important because what it means to be a girl is constantly changing, although not necessarily changing in one direction. “...Even in the same historical time frame and social context, experiences and meanings of girlhood will shift because gender and age also intersect with race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and ability.”(Aaploa 2005: 1) The focus on ability is especially important when studying the girls in this research as ability is partly responsible to the diversity in girlhood-experiences; likewise do ‘their desires and investments in particular versions of young femininity’ matter. (Aapola 2005:11)

What it means than to be a girl in specific contexts is internalized by girls in diverse manners and is subject to change and often left undocumented: ‘It is not simply that life changes rapidly and vast domains of human struggle and achievement are hardly the object of documentation, archiving, or empirical description – and even less so of satisfactory narrative or interpretive understanding. It is also that uncertainty and turbulence, instability and unpredictability, and rapid, chronic, and multi-directional shifts are the social forms taken, in many instances, by daily experience.’ (Mbembe 2004: 349) The social forms taken then are

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20 In this research I speak of girls and young women but the young women in some respects are still to be seen as girls, while some of the girls can be seen as young women. See chapter 4
not always predictable. It is important to keep in mind that, although the environment might be classified as highly uncertain and full of risks it might not just be the *wasteland* for girls and young women"... *but at times may also be a field ripe with possibilities for upwards social and economic mobility, even as it may also contain unforeseen pitfalls that lead to increased marginalization*” as Utas (2005:408) describes for young women in war. To borrow from Utas, the proposition here than is to not only emphasize the city of N’Djamena as a failed urban project, a wasteland for the girls that are moving through it, but a space that offers opportunities for mobility. To claim that these movements lead upwards might be a step too far because positions change with different and unexpected paces. A very nuanced approach to girls and young women will be needed to put aspects of their navigation in a right and comprehensive perspective.

**Exploring Navigation**

Having argued that the diversity in experiences of the girls in this research should be central to our understanding, means one needs a starting point for analysis that leaves room to describe the unknown...the still-shaping, still (or ever) in progress social spaces and urban characteristics (Mbare 2004: 349) and the pathways that lead through it. In this research it seemed most logical to put the concept of navigation central to the analysis. Navigation in the way Vigh (2006) introduced it is a specific view on the theories of ‘interplay between social perspectives, actions and forces’ inspired by the work of Pierre Bordieu, on “how a group of agents seek to move within a complex set of societal structures and confinements.” (Vigh 2006: 11-12) Yet to be able to stress the volatile and non-transparent social-political environments the youth in his study move through21, and to stress the “governance and adjustment between self and other” (Vigh citing Jackson 1998:18) and therewith the constantly shifting behaviour of youth, the concept of social navigation was developed.

Social navigation as an analytical concept has been used to make sense of ‘deliberate engagements in warfare” (Vigh 2006:11) of urban youth in the civil war of Guinea Bissau that started in 1998. Vigh’s main analytical aim was “to propose a perspective of youth in war through a theory of social navigation: that is, through attentiveness to the way in which agents seek to draw and actualize their life trajectories in order to increase their social possibilities and life chances in a shifting and volatile social environment.” (Vigh 2006:11) Utas (2005) likewise has explored the concept of social navigation to account for the complex manner in which women are engaged in war (Liberia); not merely as victims, but practising tactical agency and sometimes becoming perpetrators of war crimes themselves. Although the girls in this research are not moving through landscapes of war22 the daily environment in N’Djamena is turbulent and repressing and survival is a daily task for many.

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22 There are sometimes however close connections to a proxy past of war and uncertainty
In *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood, Social becoming in an African context*. (Christiansen et al. 2006) ‘navigation’ is convincingly tried as a concept to make sense of movement and development of contemporary African youth. Yet the concept here is much more applied as a developmental one. The way to adulthood, obtainable or not, is examined through notions of *social being* and *becoming*. In the present research however it was not found that girls were so busy ‘becoming’ adults or obtaining specific social statuses. This is not to say that they aimed to be in fixed places like to remain in the city as migrants forever. Their horizons (Vigh 2006) seemed based on proximity, not only as a consequence of limited opportunities, but perhaps more importantly as a generational characteristic of young girls, the harshness of society and the little people in Chad dare to dream of further-away futures. As a consequence I found that this research demands a focus on more proxy horizons (obtaining some food at the end of the day, some consumer goods at the end of the month, reunification with a far away boyfriend, having fun with friends, being able to buy family something small for Christmas), and that the becoming of meaningful adults is not a very *emic* aim or concern at this stage of their lives, but more something of the development-jargon.

Despite a difference in the approach of horizons in comparison with Vigh, I argue that navigation remains a very useful concept to this research: its use seeks to develop answers to the structure-agency debate in a particular setting. Navigation demands attention for landscapes and actors, it leaves room for life stories and non-predetermined, so to say non-tarmaced roads or pathways. In navigating there is room for individual variation, for border crossings and adaptation to and appropriation of social landscapes. Navigation originally is a term with strong geographical reference but it can be used to incorporate what I have named the landscapes of friendship and affection as well; the landscapes that will prove very important in this research. Studying navigation from the perspective of girls and young women lastly, might have complementary value to studies conducted so far on navigation, as female youth have remained still largely out of the picture.

**Landscapes**

Navigation then is not something taking place in a vacuum. To further the analysis it becomes very important to identify what the landscapes are that these girls navigate through. But what do we consider a landscape? In the work of Utas and Vigh (2005, 2006) the social terrains of war are the mere field of exploration through which the youth in their work navigate. Vigh prefers to speak of terrains and environments to be able to better address the unstable socio-political environment constantly in fluctuation. The term field used for this by Bordieu is unable to capture these volatile environments he argues, as it suggests too much stability. (2006:12) In this thesis I have already argued N’Djamena is not a war-scape, but it is a landscape in which historical and today’s

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\(^{23}\) *Emic* here refers to the perspective of the girls themselves, whereas *etic* as its counterpart refers to analytical explanations by the outsider, for example the researcher.

\(^{24}\) Although the work of Utas (2005) is an important exception.
uncertainties have left traces on memory and behaviour, architecture and moral spaces within the city. The appropriate way to approach this city and the girls within then is to speak of very specific urban landscapes through which the girls navigate. If, as Simone (cited above) states, cities are about the accelerated interaction between bodies, landscapes, objects and technologies, then this research is focussed foremost on the interactions between the first two categories. (Simone 2004: 408) The urban landscapes consist of political, economical and social layers and I argue the small landscapes of friendship and affection weave through this and deserve more emphasis than has so far been given. The gain of speaking of these urban layers as landscapes than is that the suffix –scape leaves open room for irregular and volatile shapes of the landscapes. Furthermore the suffix –scapes indicates that we are speaking about “deeply perspectival constructs, constructs, infected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors…….”(Appadurai 2007: 52) Landscapes can be seen as deeply influenced by the perspective of an actor. And the actor does not only move through landscapes but interacts with them and shapes them in the process of this movement.

But why constrain this study to the urban landscapes, when all the actors in this research come from beyond its boarders (southern villages or small towns, or the Central African Republic)? This approach is chosen because of the idea that the town has permeable boarders and that it is not strictly divided from the rural or another town or country, not in terms of the social, or kin, or the political economy at least. (De Bruijn et al. 2001, Roitman 2004) What is interesting about the chosen focus on a city is that the city can be seen as the place where in enlarged forms comes to stage what happens in the rest of a country: it displays who posses power, who have the means, what types of negotiations take place and how insecurities and possibilities are interwoven into the landscapes of everyday life.

What do we do when we take an African city as a point of departure/ as a stage to study social actors? According to Mbembe and Nuttal (2004: 353) “ways of seeing and reading contemporary African cities are still dominated by the metanarrative of urbanization, modernization, and crisis”. Unequal distributions of wealth and thus unequal economical and political relations form the core of understanding of a city in a lot of research. But a town has more to it than its easily overseable images and sentiments: “Indeed, a city is not simply a string of infrastructures, technologies, and legal entities, however networked these are. It also comprises actual people, images and architectural forms, footprints and memories; the city is a place of manifold rhythms, a world of sounds, private freedom, pleasures, and sensations”. (Mbembe and Nuttal, 2004: 360) The city thus, brings a whole lot of layers together in the present landscape...from the historical to the architectural and this can serve this research's analysis. Because not all these parts of the larger landscape can be investigated on in this thesis it is important to take into consideration which landscapes are most important to the girls participating in this research themselves. Therefore the following landscapes will be elaborated on: first is the landscape of uncertainty which forms a very specific 'volatile structure' in N'Djamena. Of huge importance
furthermore, partly because it has remained understudied, partly because it seems to form the core of understanding girl-migration in this context- are the landscapes of solidarity and affection between girl-peers. Peers seem to form an extremely important type of human anchorage in the city of N’Djamena. Classificatory parents to a lesser, or at least very different extend figure in these landscapes as well.

**Landscapes of uncertainty**

N’Djamena as the landscape in which se débrouiller\(^{25}\) has become the most practised verb is not very unique to the region.\(^{26}\) In combination with the cities specific history, recurring threats of rebel-attacks, and the poverty of people living within it, the city forms a very specific uncertain landscape. Violence, an imposing political elite, the insecurity of maintaining jobs, a regime that destroys houses or rainy-season floods that do the same...life in N’Djamena is characterized by uncertainty. In the following, more historical chapter it will become clear that factors since and even before independence have contributed to a specific sphere of contest between southern people and a diversity of northern political-military fractions. There have been scenes of fighting and expulsion in N’Djamena during 1979-1982 and in that period southerners in the capital were pushed back to the South of Chad. Today’s scenery still consists of occasional fighting in the centre or outskirts of N’Djamena (February 2008, April 2006 for example). The political pouvoir and therewith also the (oil-) money and means of repression -army and police- are controlled by a very specific part of the population which renders others defenceless in everyday life when they face the law. The political-economical climate at the moment is very specific and plays its roles in the period described in this research. For example it is related to this particular period in Chad that domestic workers have identified their chances for earning a monthly wage in Muslim households in northern parts of town. Many southerners claim that therewith they enter the spaces of inferiority and reference to slavery is sometimes made.

The question would of course be if it would not also be about inferiority when the girls would be working in southern households. The point is that to certain extend, and moving within the so called ‘informal’ economies, children and youth in such a town move through specifically marginalized and uncertain spaces. Also when they reside in southern parts of town or in southern households they often would still hold unequal and inferior positions and are without decent resources mostly. Living in the margins of society is a reality for many people in N’Djamena. Living on the streets and a dependency on the informal economy are the most visible outcomes of this. (De Bruijn 2007: 268-269). The margins become a centre stage to them (ibid.). How historically and

\(^{25}\) “To manage/to cope”.

\(^{26}\) See for example Waage 2006
contemporary uncertainties take shape and influence the urban landscapes will be central to chapter 4.

**Landscapes of affection and solidarity**

Capitals in Africa are for some of the reasons mentioned above and for very practical reasons (due to failed projects of infrastructure and sanitation for example) often pathological cities to outsiders and quite often also to part of the people that live within them. Labelling the city as such has as implication that micro scales of functioning and interaction, such as those in the landscapes of affection and friendships, are often missed, deemed irrelevant or non-existent. With a focus on the girls and their very small networks I try to elaborate on something that happens underneath the predominant urban image - but of course develops in dialogue with it - actually something that shapes the urban surface and therefore the urban as much as political instability, namely the close social networks of urban migrants.

Since the Manchester School (1940's to 1960's) there has been an important focus on social networks in the study of urban migrants in Africa. During time theories have been adjusted and corrected but the social networks of migrants remains an important focus of urban studies. When we look at studies of young migrants however, they are surprisingly enough often portrayed as being without or out of a network when they move on their own. More recently the role of adults in this process is identified under the name of the “intergenerational contract” (Whitehead et al. 2007). Attention for small peer-groups in town as an important locus of belonging and safety have however hardly been studied.

The focus on migrant girls is often on the interaction with adults as living in domestic workers (either with uncles or aunts or strangers) but in the case of N’Djamena it was identified that at least 50% of the girls lived and acted in small peer-groups. The fact that they found closeness and support, solidarity and help within a group of same-sex and same-age mates seemed very important for their maintenance in town but has so far hardly been studied as a social dynamic. The fact that peers in the context of migration can offer each other emotional and practical support will be explored in this research and seems especially interesting since the navigation is through such an uncertain landscape. The focus on navigation then demands to explore what these groups have to offer and where they remain incapable of helping/supporting the individual migrant.

Peer-groups sometimes have had an explanatory function in research on migration (Moch 1993) but not those of the young-aged. Children were until recently seen as deprived of any social

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27 See Konings et al. 2006
28 Moch has identified poor-women’s networks in 19th century Paris as highly essential for their survival in Paris, but the migrants she speaks about are generally of an older age, and for example seem not to be living together in small groups. Schrover likewise has described the reliance of German-migrant sisters upon each other when settling in Utrecht (2003:280) but a larger group-formation, living on their own in both historical European studies do not come to the fore. In contemporary literature on Africa I have not found this back either, unless slightly in the work of Moyer (2006).
and economic power (Christiansen, Utas & Vigh 2006: Introduction), as not possessing the social
recourses sufficient enough pour se débrouiller (‘to manage/ to cope’) let alone help others in this
respect and thus as of marginal relevance to their survival. Nowadays however, there is quite some
attention for the agency of children and adolescents, recognizing and focusing on the social capital of
networks among the young will reveal social dynamics very essential to theorizing on their agency.

In general, the literature on the social dynamics and the importance of peer-groups as a
social resource to children and adolescents is not abundant. In the available (American) literature on
peer-groups it is assumed that in peer-groups become more influential in the phase of adolescence
and as a consequence the influence of parents diminishes (Brown 1993). A lot of this type of research
is based on very linear models of (child->adolescent) development. According to its models pre-
adolescent peer-groups are for example predominantly unisexual in composition. Following up on
this, adolescent groups are characterized as being more ‘marked by an increasing volume of
heterosexual choices of preferred associates’ (Dunphy 1963: 230-231). Interesting in these approaches
is that peer-groups are seen as non-static but developing in composition and function (in the end
towards entities of heterosexual couples out of which marriage might result, Dunphy 1963, 231). But
furthermore the applicability of these kinds of theories should be questioned. The adolescent groups
that come to the fore in this research in N’Djamena are predominantly unisexual in nature, also those
of young women. An even more relevant difference to mention here is that participation in the
studied American peer-groups is described as an extra-familial activity, something additional to the
home, while this research is about peer-groups in the absence of close parents or family-
compositions. Peer groups in N’Djamena form the core of living, eating, supporting and saving
together as age-mates. Reference here to other kinds of peer-grouping in African societies would
perhaps be very relevant. In this particular context some comparison between the motivators behind
female initiation in parts of Southern Chad and the movement of girls to town seems possible. The
comparison is mostly within the fact that as Leonard (2000a, 2000b) has shown young girls from
southern Chad seem to have initiated the movement towards the practice of female initiation and
therewith female circumcision themselves. It was their own choice to participate in something of
which they had no knowledge in what was going to happen, but something of which they had seen
the outcome and liked to pursue that same goal. The outcome was about dancing, beautiful looks,
receiving presents and presenting themselves to the villages as no longer a child. Leonard herself
does not analyze this in terms of agency, but for many purposes this story is of important worth to
understand the agency of the group of southern domestics in this paper. As there seem to be quite
some parallels between both movements and initiatives by young girls.

Focusing on the social networks of domestic workers and prostitutes thus is still a very
interesting field, a field that has not thoroughly been studied. Ironically enough both groups are seen

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29 In speaking of peer-goups here and further on, I am speaking of same-age young people in small groups.
30 Except for youth gangs or to some extend the grouping of street children.
31 See chapter 6
as very much cut off from social networks or relying solely on the employer or in case of prostitution on a pimp. If there are friendships between prostitutes than these are seen as forcibly depending on each other due to their situation of destitution. When poor girls live on the streets they are seen as very difficult to be able to survive without some kind of dependency of men, securing some income by exchanging sexual favours. (Rurevo 2003). In other words the networks of young migrants are deemed to be seen suppressive, destitute or non-existent. A perspective beyond this is needed to understand the human anchorage of (young) girls in a new town. The landscape of affection and solidarity relies mostly on peers and only in the second place on adults. (See Chapter 6 & 7)

**Appropriating a city**

In order then to navigate through N’Djamena, the girls need peers, but they also need to interact with the larger urban landscape. In doing so they appropriate the urban landscape to be able to use its features. In the process of mobility the girls move through spaces where other cultural, religious and moral norms are dominant. In order to move through the northern Muslim quarters they have to wear veils for example. Rather than addressing this as a type of (forced) assimilation and the girls as mere victims of the socio-economic structures in town, the data shows that girls try to make use of what the urban landscape offers as opportunity and appropriate for example dress and language to negotiate an economic mobility.

Appropriation in anthropology has been used foremost to elaborate on how African people deal with ‘modernity’ (see for example Van Binsbergen & van Dijk 2004), religious influences (Nageeb 2007), or an absence of urban governance (Leonard 2005). It tries to show that people do not necessarily accept (new) structures as a given, but give them their own meaning and make use of them in specific, self-invented ways. Appropriation thus has proved a very useful concept to discover how people deal with the urban fabric: how they use public wells, make their self-taxed bridges, fix second-hand stuff from garbage-places to enter another life-cycle (de Bruijn 2007) and use wheelchairs to smuggle sugar across the border from Cameroon.

African youth in the literature already mentioned above thus are often portrayed as creatively dealing with what the city has to offer in terms of urban niches, appropriating public spaces and the features of modernity. They are seen as mediators between the old and the new and as the ideal persons to adjust to new circumstances because of their youth. According to Honwana & de Boeck (2000) young people and their position in society “awakens within a double dynamic: the perception of the marginality and liminality of that youth and the place simultaneously at the centre of society gives them an immense ‘pouvoir’.” (2000: 11) While appropriation has been related to the resistance of youth in urban public spaces (de Haan 2005), these girls do not so much resist or challenge existing orders, but they do make use of the urban landscape in their own way and give meaning to their life and behaviour within it. This is not a new perspective, for migrating/immigrant children have often
proven to more easily cross cultural boundaries in host-societies (Knörr 2005). Nevertheless the girls in this research are not naturally in contact with girls of other cultures of their age in school, nor do they have to play the role of cultural translators to their parents, roles according to which the above mentioned perspective emerged. These girls come without parents and the interaction with the different cultural part of town is through the work they do. Boundary-crossing then is an important feature of their work in N'Djamena. This type of mobility for domestic workers is not new: “Domestic service involves the mixing of a variety of categories that might otherwise be kept separate including class, race, ethnicity, nationality and gender, depending on the particulars of local hierarchies and economies.” (S. Dickey, 2000: 470) As such much of this youth are more mobile and cross more borders than their parents would engage with the urban landscape. With the use of ‘appropriation than, like Honwana & de Boeck have stated, this study proposes “the analysis of the capacity of youth to establish the mediations between the contradictory social-cultural frontiers that they search to occupy.” (2000: 12)

**Historiography**

In this part of the thesis an overview of the relevant literature is given. Perspectives that have been developed on the migration of girls and young women will selectively be examined for their value for this particular research in which the focus is on the city.

There exists quite a body of literature on the specific interplay between gender and migration. Closely related to this there exists a lot of literature on domestic workers and prostitutes. This literature covers a large geographic width and historical depth. (Moch 1993 & 2003, Lawson 1998, Schrover 2003, Brennan 2004, Moya 2007, Nyanuti Ondimu 2007 for example) The way the migration of women was perceived historically often closely related to ideas about women’s vulnerability or stemmed from moral concerns. These issues predominate in current studies on child migration as well. A short insight in this line of thinking will be given, but regarding the overall aim of this research a literature that goes beyond this focus has been sought for. Literature that focuses on young African urban migrants and important lines of understanding their ‘making it work’ will be touched upon.

Women moving alone, in the most diverse societies have tended, and still tend to generate debate. In the U.S. in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, this was mainly related to the countries immigration policies. Moloney (2006) shows how independent female immigrants could be prone to moral judgement and deportation on the presumed basis that they where having illegal relationships (out of wedlock) or were engaged in prostitution. According to Moloney this reflected “deeper social concerns about women’s shifting economic and political roles and the definitions and expectations of marriage”. (Ibidem 2006: 95). An article on the migration of Hausa women in Nigeria in the early 1980’s by R. Pittin (1984) shows that “in a society of seclusion and strict social control, migration (of young women) may be a tantamount to prostitution” in the public’s eye. Nevertheless she additionally tries to examine an “alternative ideology” or the ways in which women “can evade, or transcend some of
the constraints of a strongly male-dominant society”. (Pittin 1984: 1295) Ever since the early awareness of
the independent migration of women, it seemed the imagination surrounding their movement did
not match actual patterns and motives of migration. Women moving alone were often immediately
connected to practices of prostitution and trafficking and seen as in need of (moral) rescuing
(Soderlund 2005). We may say that these types of concerns about the independent movement of
women have extended to the field of children moving alone. In particular girl migrants in migration
discourses seem to be easily connected to prostitution and (sexual-) exploitation. This can especially
found back in relation to the debates there are on trafficking. Much of this is based on ideas about
both groups -women and children- as inherently vulnerable and easy victims, especially also in
connection to current globalization and corruption issues. (Agbu 2003) This as a consequence means
that our information on the migration of girls rarely extends beyond some information on trafficking
in certain areas, a discourse that is very often shaped by the voices of NGO’s and policymakers.

New publications are coming to the fore however, in which attention is paid to the voices of
children and their own perspective on migration. There is an upcoming tendency to look beyond the
extreme forms of child mobility that was able to invisibilise other forms of child migration.(Whitehead
and Hasim 2005) More and more acknowledgement is being given to the way children and youth in
developing countries -although they may not be well prepared for the outcomes of migration- see
migration as (the only) form of upward social mobility or “as a way to access to significantly better
opportunities”. (DRC 2008)

It has become a specific focus of these sources to understand in particular the motives of boys
and girls on the move to urban centres. Historically and worldwide there seem to be several general
factors playing a role in the motivations of the migration of girls/ young women. Bras (2003) for
example is focused on similar types of migration in the Netherlands during 1850-1950. The focus is
more in migration decisions and she discerns both family and individual strategies behind their
movement. “Higher wages, emancipation from the parental home, and the desire to participate in urban
leisure activities were individual motives......” Furthermore she relates the strategies of families to risk-
diversification.(2003: 242) These remain very classical motives. Besides that the migration of children
and adolescents is also seen as a pathway to learning, to become mature and to learn to deal with
one’s own money. (DRC 2008: 2)

Sometimes specific attention is paid to the differences between girls and boys in the
migration process. Thorsen (2007) according to her studies on child migration in Burkina Faso has
found that whereas boys face several job-opportunities in town, those of girls are very restricted. Girl-
migrants are most likely to work for an aunt and are not sure of earning a wage. A trousseau on
return to the village might be the only remuneration for these domestic workers. As such, with the
little money the girls earn they are less likely to be able to save for a bicycle, something adolescent
boys from the village aim to return with. Girls that received wage on irregular base or that only were remunerated in goods were unable to really save money. “Instead, they emphasized the status and skills they gained such as clothes, things for their trousseau and, in particular, urban cooking skills -- things that would help them find a good husband, and preferably one who appreciated their urban skills, that is, a migrant. Thereby they reiterated adult notions of rural girlhood, namely that adolescent girls are ready to marry and that they in fact do not think about much else.” (Thorsen 2007: 23) Bouju explains such behaviour differently: the explanation of migration by girls as the search for a trousseau is the most easily expressible reason for girls he says. The other reasons are much more difficult to express and only very few were able to refer to reasons of a degradation of the conditions of rural life and a degradations of social networks. (2006: 32-33)

Like many working on the topic of girl migrants, Bouju tends to take a lot of agency away from the girls and displays them as the victims of normless, lawless and patriarchal societies. In his article however he focuses on a particular group in of girls that have experienced pregnancy 15 % of 80 %. (=5. 33 percent) and bases the analysis of girl-migrants as the poorest victims to social violence hereupon. Although many of the analysis of social violence as a growing feature of Malian society is interesting, the way he uses this data and the way he represents girls as the victims of (changing and diversifying) society is a little misleading and once more totally distracts the attention from girls as somehow also agents. Bouju is not giving us more perspectives on the way girls perceive and deal with these structural constrains in Malian society. The girls in that particular research then become victims of a traditional and at the same time normless and (sexually) violent society. The focus of other researchers too is only on the experience of violence in the workplace. (Nyanuti Ondimu 2007). It is sometimes striking how the data these researchers have gathered give the impulse to reflect on the migration of girls differently-for example on the networks of peers that help them find jobs-they do not deal with these facts critically and do not search beyond the paradigm of exclusion and violence to vulnerable girls.

Problematic furthermore is that the above mentioned researchers leave little room for diversity and agency regarding girl migrants, while in the field one is likely to encounter a diversity in experiences in which due to specific reasons, some girls are better able to address the daily circumstances than others. This research in that sense seems particular as it deals with how young girls living together in N’Djamena -the new town- where they in several senses function as a group. Those that did not try to find groups or lived alone with kin faced very different challenges. In N’Djamena it was found that these small groups mediate and facilitate well-being for the girls in town. Although recently reference is made to such small groups of peers called informal safety nets or informal support networks, they are paid minor attention to for they are seen as offering young

32 Many boys in her research had as a final aim to return to the village with a selve-earned bicycle: “Apart from giving the boys a new mobility -an important point for adolescents who otherwise have been used to walk 15-20 kilometers to get to the nearest town - a bicycle earns them merit with both their family and friends. Not only does it demonstrate their income-earning skills, it also highlights their ability to save up and it is a commodity that can be lent out, creating social debts to be returned later”. (Thorsen 2007: 24-25)
migrants only limited protection. (DRC2008:03) In most research on domestic workers (Africa and beyond) this topic is hardly touched upon because most domestic workers such research deals with are living-in domestics. Their position is likely to be quite different from many girls in this research. Living-in domestics are most often equated with exploitation and violence, invisibility, and the falling beyond the scope of the law. (Human Rights Watch 2005, Blagborough 2008 etc.) Jaquemin (2004) however shows that there are several types of groups of domestic workers with different positions and living conditions. Yet she does not elaborated on the difference this makes for girls. The characteristics of the girls followed in this research: those that live and work independently of classificatory parents or adults in small groups than seems to form a relatively new issue.

In little literature the presences of peers in town is put to the centre stage -or it has to be in the study of gangs and/or street boys- while there are reasons to believe that these are very important. Although Moch (1993), Schrover (2003) and Ross (1983) emphasize the proximity of solidarity as very important for the (poor) female-migrant experience, the types of grouping found in N'Djamena are not comparable. The prevailing tendency has been to link up the migration of children and youth to adults. Parents than figure as important accommodators, employers, exploiters or parents. This relationship with parents has been labelled problematic and has even been criminalized lately.

According to Ross (1983) and Accampo (1993) the networks of poor women are especially needed in the absence of state and in the absence of any other type of social security. In Africa the recent tendency to explain such cooping than has been to extensively stress the creativity of the urban poor and urban youth. Understanding how girls manage in the urban setting through these types of creativity has been examined as the literature focuses on male youth.. The way Simone (2004) stresses the redundancy of social networks needed to survive in African capitals was not found back explicitly in the way the girls in this research search their space for manoeuvre. Specific attributes to the urban cooping of youth has been based on studies of male youth and how this might work different for girls is still hardly studied. This is closely related to the question of whether a social category like female youth exists in Africa. While their male counterpart is often portrayed as a rebelling, creative, procreative cultural and sometimes destructive social force to societies, female youth in many countries seems not to exist. There where girls from their puberty on are often from a young age expected to engage in reproductive and spouse- roles there seems little room for a category of girl youth. However, due to the high amount of changes in contemporary African societies the roles of girls are shifting (Whyte in Christiansen 2006), raising much questions about the constructions and creations of ' female youth'. Rwebangira(1998) and Moyer (2006) have been pioneers in the field to describe more in-depth how girls and young women in town create and seek for human anchorage and need to create spaces of belonging. Moyer (2006) did ground breaking work in the study of urban youth and urban localities. Her analysis gives deep insight how youth engage actively with the urban fabric, mould it according to their own expectations and give meaning
to public and private spaces. Leonard (2000a, 2000b) has specifically paid attention to the initiative and changing roles in Sara communities triggered and initiated by girls. Together these last three works offer extremely valuable insights that have inspired this research to take up further the inquiry of contemporary positions of girls in African societies and the way they perceive their surrounding and try to make things work.

Conclusion
This research is formulated around the question of interaction between specific structures and actors. The main approach to analyse this, I have argued is exploring the usefulness of the concept of navigation to understand moving girls and young women in N'Djamena. This approach might be able to avoid a thinning of the social, to identify a layered processes / a movement in multiple directions instead of labelling the girls and young women only as domestic workers and prostitutes while they are also friends, girlfriends, acquaintances, mothers, Sara or Kabalaye, neighbours , Christian, etc. Nor should the city only be seen as a failed urban project or N'Djamena only as the extremely marginalized setting in which these girls live. In trying to understand the navigation of the specific groups in this research attention is paid to specific parts of their interaction and interrelationships with urban landscapes. The closeness of peers in very specific ways seems to have been of underestimated value in studies of young female migrants so far. The importance of this type of human anchorage goes beyond the economical rationale of access to resources but tries to encapsulate the needs for human affection and closeness and trust and loyalty as essential for the wellbeing of girls in the African urban context. Although conflict, jealousy and split-ups should than also be seen as part of this process. 34

These peers then but also to a lesser extend parents (human anchorage) in the urban landscape as essential to understand the navigation of girls in N'Djamena's uncertain and volatile daily reality. Another very important aspect of navigation is how especially girls deal with the geographies of exclusion and inclusion, how they cross borders between different spheres in town, how they mediate access and in the process appropriate the material facilitators of this access.

The process of navigation as the interplay between girls and city could have been studied in different ways but the empirical data have led to identify these themes as most important to better understand the interaction. They will be worked out in the following chapters.

33 Communities many of the bonnes come from
34 Although I have encountered very little data on this.
3. Methodology

Introduction
This research is focused on the navigation of girls and young women in the uncertain and volatile environment of a specific town. To study agency and the interplay with environments the researcher is likely to aim for an understanding of *emic* perspectives and subjective experiences. This chapter will elaborate on the methodologies used to undertake this research, the reasons why they were chosen and sometimes changed over time. For the larger part this research took place in N’Djamena, the capital of Chad. Coming to N’Djamena with an interesting theme in mind, but hardly any empirical data to build on, this research was exploratory in nature and foremost departed from urban realities observed during the period of fieldwork. In the process this research also led to some southern villages, 'sending communities' of the largest group of girls in this study. Research methods there were more compressed, constrained to time and transport, yet gave very important additional information and insight, like the process of travelling did. This aspect of the research can best be seen as a method of triangulation and informing better questions on our return to N’Djamena. Apart from being multi-sited this research could be characterized as highly dependent on group meetings and partly came close to street- or urban ethnography. Beyond qualitative research methods like interviews and follow-up interviews and observation, NGO reports as well as journalistic material and some theses were gathered. The last two sources were found at the CEFOD library in N’Djamena\(^{35}\). The gathering of data was not systematic, as there were many factors we did not have in hand. One was the mobility of girls and young women themselves, second were the working hours of the girls, and third the difficulty to access neighbourhoods as researchers during the evenings. In the rainy season some peripheral quarters were almost inaccessible. Therefore this research depended

\(^{35}\) Centre d’Etude et de Formation pour le Développement
foremost on opportunities, a mobility of the researcher and research assistant, a continuous search for
new pathways and foremost on not giving up.

In the following several different aspects will be elaborated on that are very important to
understand how this research took shape. Consecutively the working with an assistant, working
along the streets and working with groups will be elaborated on. Also the manners of gathering data
among young girls (part of the research group was 11-14 years old) will be explained.

Working with a research assistant
On arrival in a town like N'Djamena one needs a good guide. I was lucky to have contact with
Guedengao Konaye from the very start through the help of my supervisor prof. dr. Mirjam de Bruijn.
The first night in N'Djamena we walked through the quarter of Moursal in the dark and we explored
what types of girls were hanging out there and already began to discuss a research approach.
Although she had not assisted research before we soon found our ways and strategies and
Guedengao could not have been missed for the translations and the many languages and dialects she
spoke and understood³⁶. Guedengao was able to approach young girls on the streets with laughter
and jokes and therewith won them over to engage in short interviews or group meetings. With most
of the girls from villages in southern Chad I depended fully on her translation, while with the other
two groups I could most often communicate in French. She was a natural speaker in group-meetings,
starting with small groups of girls, to whole villages in the south. In the midst of translation, she
would even sometimes whisper to me what I could reply best to a respected village chief or official.
In many ways Guedengao was guiding me through a cultural landscape, while at the same time we
were seeking ways forward with the research. Us both being young women provided us with
relatively easy access to the girls in the research, although the youngest were really shy towards us.
Sometimes we became like friends with our informants which made it difficult to remain posing all
this inquiring questions and being and observing became more of a research strategy, this was
especially the case in Kabalaye.

The fact that I was working with Guedengao, a young woman from the south, had its impact
on where we could easily move through town and where this was more difficult. Guedengao was not
confident about undertaking research together in northern parts of town. She hardly knew anyone
there and with our street-present research behaviour she was afraid this would raise a lot of
difficulties with northern people. Her strength as a research assistant was that she knew someone
everywhere in southern N'Djamena. Sometimes we did go north but we attracted a lot of attention
while we covertly tried to count the girls that came back after a day of work. There we did not dare to
start a chat with these girls. We feared the interference of men in our conversation, the men that were

³⁶ Although her mother tongue was Sara Ngambai she understood many southern languages (that were often close related)
because she had lived in different parts of the South. Besides that she spoke Chadian Arabic.
so present on the streets at four in the afternoon. Muslim men who could think we aimed solely to hear how these girls were exploited in Muslim households. Some contacts in these neighbourhoods I therefore undertook by the help of other intermediaries, but the research done in northern parts of town remained based on observations only.37

**Street corners as setting**

Because the group of girls that worked in domestics had little time to themselves and we did not search to visit them in the households where they worked -due to matters of freedom of speech- the moments we could work with them were minimal. From the first week on we therefore started working from a rock along avenue Mobutu. We soon called that place our second home. From there we tried to approach girls that passed in fast pace on their way home -around 17:00 am- coming from the central and northern quarters of town, heading to the peripheral southern Walia, Habena or further. Sometimes we were lucky; after some small-talk Guedengao told the girls that I was doing a survey for ‘my school in Europe’ and that I would like to ask them some questions. Sometimes this led to interesting interviews with girls that the next day came back with their friends. Time however was a constraint as the girls wanted to get home before dark and still had long distances to walk. Therefore on beforehand we told them that we would be able to give them the 200 cfa38 for the taxi39 if they would want to work with us. Still the depth of those half-hour meetings and the insecurity whether follow-ups would actually take place was not satisfying. Sometimes also we went home without even a reasonable chat with one of the girls. Fortunately through snowball strategies highly saturated Sundays became part of our working schedule in which we met with different groups of domestics in the different quarters of town they lived in. Sundays were the only free days they had to themselves and although going to church, washing their clothes and braiding their hair at this only free day were main activities, it was not too difficult to get small groups of girls together.

Road-side strategies remained an important part of our weekly activities, if only it were to gather simplified trajectories of a lot of different girls. (Place of birth, family circumstances, why and how to N’Djamena, movements before that and after arrival in N’Djamena) Difficulty sometimes was that my presence at the roadside was able to generate quite some curiosity of other people and we were reluctant to give strangers too much information. Sometimes from hospital guards we got a little bench to use the same kind of approach at another important street (avenue Charles de Gaulle at the height of Moursal-Chagoua) of these girls movements. At another place it was almost impossible to do our work, in that particular Muslim-neighbourhood the streets in the afternoon were full of men. Shop owners and their acquaintances dominated the street view, most of them sitting on mats in

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37 Seeking contact with employers or doing research inside the homes where domestic workers worked was not the aim of this research. We were focused on the girls’ own understanding of their work and the choices they made within.

38 The equivalent of approximately 30 eurocents.

39 Taxi in this case means a mini-bus.
front of the shops in white djellabas. As that part of town was especially identified with the work of the girls it would be very difficult to act openly, if only it would attract so much interference and opinions. Covert research appeared difficult as Guedengao and I were not from there, and our hanging around-research behaviour was much less accepted here than in the more southern parts of town. Our presence in those parts of town triggered to much attention to work reasonably.

Although sometimes frustrating, walking all afternoons through N’Djamena became very important modes of observation. In the process Guedengao and I called ourselves street girls and learned to deal with questioning eyes we as street wanderers were confronted with. Hanging around bars in Kabalaye, ‘the hot quarter of town’ according to its people, formed another street-corner activity. During mornings we used to visit some of the girls active in this quarter where prostitution was one of the most prevailing activities. The spot always lent itself (especially because informants were almost always late) to observe street life in this part of town. Women smugglers, coming from Cameroon by canoe, square-shaped by the goods they carried under their clothes to the market place. Occasionally 5 minutes after the military-customs speeded after them in the same direction. It was also the place were the lavandiers40 passed by, jobless men hung out, off duty soldiers crossed around on motorbikes and a hundred petty traders came across, displaying goods on boards and their body, walking under the hot sun all-day. Those last were often fooled around with by non-Arabs41, insulting them and the prices they asked for their goods. A lot of informal jobs in Chad can be labelled ethnically stratified. In the bars we met with girls and young women from the Central-African Republic, besides also the Chadian girls we worked with, Cameroonian and Congolese young women inhabited this quarter.

**Street ethnography**

Being a wanderer, doing practically everything by foot, a lot of parts of N’Djamena revealed themselves to us. There are of course also a lot of parts of town this research did not take us to and thus we never came, or settings a stranger will never be part of. But this exploration of town was essential for understanding different spheres, the different behaviours needed in different parts of town, the alliances one can better make to feel safe in specific places and other attitudes characteristic to N’Djamena, the city that also the girl-migrants in our research navigated through and made their own in specific ways. Sentiments of friends about different parts of town and informants’ descriptions of the urban landscape became very important sources of information, even a taxi-ride with people commenting on what happened around them could be.

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40 Men and women that gathered the laundry from inner-city households to wash and dry them at the riverside during the day. They tended to carry heavy loads on bikes or carts. Most of the time this work was done by men, occasionally only by women. This job was especially linked to Bilala men and Nigerian people that once came to Chad to earn their way further in direction of the Hajj in Mecca.

41 Though not all of these young men were Arab-speaking. Some were students from the south trying to earn their school-fees.
Contemporary street ethnography can be seen as relational (Gigengack & van Gelder 2000) as trying to tie that what happens on the streets as related to other aspects of urban life and as being the product of what happens in other urban domains. When I speak of street-ethnography I indicate the observation and experience of influence spheres, power relations and the coping mechanisms of people that become visible on the streets. I have used this type of ethnography as instrumental to the study of girl-migrants to understand their navigation through the city. The girls did not live on the streets but the observations do touch on the politics of exclusion and inclusion as important urban dynamics. (See Gigengack & van Gelder 2000) Besides hierarchies and morals one learns from the street about constructions of (un)freedom, (not) feeling safe and the alliances necessary to make things work in particular settings. As mentioned earlier, Moyer (2006) is one of the people who did ground-breaking work in the study of urban youth and urban localities. Her analysis gives deep insight how youth engage actively with the urban fabric, mould it according to their own expectations and give meaning to public and private spaces. Like for Moyer a large part of this research consisted of wandering and listening to informants as guides through the city.

Research groups
The mobility of girls towards N’Djamena has many shapes and forms. Three ‘groups’ stood central in this research. The first and largest group consisted of girls between 11 and 19, coming from specific areas in South-Eastern Chad (Tandjilé and Mandoul, more specifically the villages of and around Dono-Manga, Pëni and Bedigrui) and were working as bonnes42 in the field of domestics. A lot of them regrouped in town with friends, although individuals -sometimes orphans- moving to older, urban settled siblings also formed an important part of the domestic workers in N’Djamena. Secondly a group of young women that came to town, partaking in a longer existing movement of rural-urban migration in Chad was included in the research. Their daily activities laid within the domain of prostitution that was occasionally exchanged for petty trading or other income generating activities. Their appropriation of the urban landscape shows the making use of different opportunities, as well as comparable patterns of appropriation, group formation and eking out a living when we compare them to the first group. The third and last group was a group of young women from the Central-African Republic, also active in prostitution. The young women fled from violent unrest in Bangui in 2003 and to some extend chose N’Djamena as destination. Although their ties to each other were strong, they seemed to suffer more from stress due to the environment and the social ties amongst seem to loosen up due to various circumstances.

Altogether these girls and young women entered the research, out of my interest in their lives, the feeling that they had things in common and comparison was possible, but one should not disregard the differences between them. What they have in common is that they are seen as girls by

42 French for female domestic workers.
the outside world and appropriate to a large or lesser extent the urban environment. Their situations lend themselves well to gain more understanding on the interrelationship between girlhood and mobility, the workings of agency and vulnerability and the social networks in which these two concepts are embedded and negotiated on. Most of the contacts resulted out of a combination of orientation on specific groups, asking intermediaries; community-chefs, the staff of (national) NGO’s or friends to bring us in contact. When we were fortunate, an initial contact resulted in follow-ups, depending on the willingness of the informant. Sometimes the informants led us on to others on our request; sometimes they were reluctant to introduce us to others for different reasons.

Listening to the stories as formulated by the girls and young women was main aim of this research. To see if there was an alternative story to their mobility (compared to media and NGO discourses). To understand their perception of mobility and the way they tended to shape their own life-course. One of the first organized meetings, headed by a community-chief and a residential chief, this aim gained more importance, as the chiefs were so dominant in their discourse, and the 40 (!) girls they had gathered for us so silent and not free to speak. This motivated even more to speak with the girls themselves.

For the group of bonnes 28 girls were interviewed once, varying from roadside interviews to interviews within the setting of an organization in which we had more time. Three girls were interviewed several times resulting in in-depth information. Additionally five groups of girls living together were interviewed in the group, most of them twice, two of them several times more. For the girls and young women of Laï and Kelo in Kabalaye I had close contact with a group of 6, some gave more interviews than others. The group of young women from the Central African Republic consisted of around 6 that have been interviewed and followed on several occasions. In the last two groups it became difficult to maintain interviews as a manner of information gathering as we became closer and paid frequent visits and got involved in their daily lives. Observation and informal talk became important and very effective sources of information. Besides that an amount of 6 community chiefs were interviewed. These chiefs informed us about the types of migration girls from their region in Chad participated in. This helped sketching the larger picture of diversity of trajectories of girls. In the same manner they shared their perspectives on what caused these movements and their moral evaluation towards this mobility. Staff from a diversity of (local) NGO’s were consulted on the topic. Additionally 2 non-migrant prostitutes and 2 non-migrant domestic workers, 3 boy-rural migrants and 6 ‘whole’ villages around Dono Manga and Bedigrui were interviewed. In the villages our work consisted of group-interviews and individual interviews, with girls, mothers or parents, but also with teachers, chiefs, influential women and market women.
**On age and interviewing**

Some of the girls among the *bonnes* and other groups were young. Their ages ranged from 11 to 18. There is a developing literature on doing research with children. Specific attention herein is with the power relations between the adult researcher and child informants and the conceptual world of the researcher (informed by adult views and perspectives) and those of children. Participative, creative methods form the core of a lot of recent work and are seen as a way of giving voice to children (Ennew 2003, Van der Brug 2007). This of-course would work in relation to children that perceive drawing, painting, playing and acting as normal part of their daily activity, or at least as something they have been in contact with before through school for example. In my research this was not necessarily the case. Though initially leaving home with a lot of ideas on participative methods I did not use either one of them. My informants, especially the younger ones (11-14 years) were used to working, whether it was washing, pounding millet or sweeping. This does not mean that in-depth interviews, the method I preferred, was normal to them, rather that to was a rather extraordinary event. (Jacquemin 2004: 386). Especially the younger girls were shy and not used to be asked about their opinion, this was not only related to their age, but also to their upbringing as girls, their cultural background in which anyone older makes you behave humble and their inability to speak French in this particular occasion. Some literally turned their head away or down when formulating answers to my questions. Luckily with the help of Guedengao, able to tease them in a very sensible way, it was often possible to trigger their engagement with the topic. But to not force upon the girls things they had no affinity with, the researcher should also let the informant’s answers guide the way. I had to act on what they did tell me, asking further and therewith trying to climb into their perspective of things. If questions hardly gave any response I would try it in a different manner or drop it when the topic only seemed relevant to me and not to them. As is quite normal, there where follow-ups were possible this made contact more fluent and accepted. Confidence tended to grow with the frequency of contact and therefore follow-up contact was considered better for real interviews. Initial contacts were used for exploration and making acquaintance.

It was interesting to find out after a while that doing something while asking questions, like sorting out peanuts or cooking together was very helpful in generating more open answers. This has to do with the less direct confrontation experienced by the girl. Although observation was part of the qualitative methods chosen for, it was also partial or fragmented. Especially when focusing on small groups and their social dynamics, there was not a lot of time to do observation. The girls from the first group worked a lot, and were hardly at home. Secondly it got dark really early in N’Djamena and a lot of quarters of town were not safely accessible at night, especially also not for me as a foreigner. Due to the gendered nature of the research, asking a male friend or assistant to accompany me there was most of the time not an option especially since the girls were young and would feel even more uncomfortable telling stories. Male friends were helpful however to go out with and

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43 Many participatory methods also count on this kind of mechanisms.
observe some of the girls in this research in clubs. But the environment of going out was rather tensed and not much of these observations were done.

**Those who did not enter the research**

In this research only one *living in* (male) domestic and one prospective (female) were interviewed. Both were in the household of a southern lady that treated them very well. The focus of this research was not on abuse, as a lot of research on domestics explicitly is. (Nyanuti Ondimu 2007, Human Rights Watch 2005, Passalet 2003) Girls where asked about this topic in sensitive ways but it was not the core of the questions. Some elders in the community indicated that living-in domestics were beyond their control and probably very bad off, exploited in northern households. Because of the nature of this research, and the large amount of *living out* domestics, approaching such girls has not actively been sought and thus they did not enter the research.\(^4\) The nature of socio-ethnic and religious relations would have made an investigation to living-in domestics a very political sensitive undertaking that we were neither prepared for nor aiming for.

Another girl I have written about observation-wise, but who hardly entered the research is Sia. Being back in the Netherlands this makes me realize a selectivity in the research I was not aware of at the time. Although during a first meeting with girls and young women from the Central African Republic, Sia was present and told something about her life, she was not very approachable ever after. She left the first meeting before the others did. In the following months, when visiting Kabalaye there would be a great chance we would meet Sia. She would shout across the street and run to us in her revealing outfit. “*ca donne le pallu*” she would say: it was her life-statement after a song. (“It gives you malaria”: her way of commenting on the disappointments and deep irony of everyday life) It was not the fact that we tried to be anonymous on the street -we hardly could as young (white and Chadian) ladies roaming around in Kabalaye- but we also did not want to attract the attention of pimps, fortunately we never met them. But Sia already at 8 a clock in the morning when such a scene would take place would be drunk or stoned or both. Although at first it was in my mind to meet her maybe early morning and see what that contact would be like, it never happened and I soon thought it would be impossible to do so without remaining anonymous to many curious men in Kabalaye. It is a mistake I think now because she formed part of the research group. Her behaviour was just so difficult that it did not fit in with the research methods and safety concerns. About Sia we heard she was much healthier in appearance when she first arrived, while now she was so thin. Others we had contact with from the Central African Republic also saw her less and were not so much in touch with her. Without Sia the story would not be complete however and thus through observation only she should still be taken into account I realize now.

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\(^4\) I do not claim here to represent in any way all domestic working girls. There is much reason to believe that living-in domestics are worse of than those living on their own. De Regt in her work about Yemen has for example paid some attention to this (2007).
This research can never claim to be representative on mobile pathways of girls that came to N'Djamena. With the selection of the 3 'groups' a lot of other 'groups' remained out of the picture. Furthermore within the chosen groups there are research-deficiencies. Like Sia and the living-in domestic workers, job-less domestic workers foremost remained out of the picture as well (unless we met them and interviewed them at two local organizations: FAFED\textsuperscript{45} and ATPFED\textsuperscript{46} who were trying to help them find decent jobs or offered them training). Domestic workers in the homes of family that did not move large distances through town and those that were to shy or disinterested to speak with us are not represented here either.

This research thus can not claim, nor intends to be inclusive. It is a first attempt to look in non-generalizing manners to the navigation of girls and young women that came to N'Djamena. Central to the analysis needs to be how they move around and through socio-political, religious and economical landscapes and the small landscapes of affection. It aims to lay bare the differences between girls and the things they have in common.

Working with groups
During the progress of the research we started working more and more with small groups of girls, and not with individuals. This started when we found girls walking home in small groups. When we visited them in their compounds they would also be present in the format of the group they lived in, ranging from five to twelve girls in our encounters. These groups then can be defined as natural groups (Green & Thorogood 2004: 109, as they borrow from Coreil 1995). Conducting interviews with groups has several advantages in general and in our particular case. In general working with groups tends to give extra information, additional to one to one interviews, on how social knowledge is constructed, and offers opportunity to observe the (natural) interaction between group-members.\textsuperscript{(Green and Thorogood 2004: 111) In our particular case working in these small groups it was ideal since the young girls gained confidence towards us (outsiders) in their small group. They felt more comfortable, and sometimes became therefore very confident, challenging us as researchers and therefore contributing to a more open and playful atmosphere of information exchange.

Working in groups also had several restraints to it. In general it is known that people in groups might keep more adverse opinions to themselves. Likewise there are always dominant speakers, answering for others though there are ways to deal with this. In our occasion it became clear that working with groups consumed a lot of time, with girls that only had the early evening and Sundays to themselves. Follow-up meetings was a way to circumvent taking all of their precious time they needed to wash, make visits and go to church. It was helpful interviewing in small groups

\textsuperscript{45} Fondation d'Amour pour la formation d'Enfants en Détresse
\textsuperscript{46} Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion des Femmes et des Enfants Désœuvré. A local association led by Monsieur Ngargos Nadjiara Beguy. He was trying to mediate working contracts for unemployed domestic workers. Contracts that would guarantee them at least minimum wage, 25.000 CFA a month. No girl we interviewed earned more than 15.000 CFA a month. 10.000 or 12.000 cfa was most common.
to be able to observe small hierarchies and interaction between its members. More private views might have been reserved however and not saying things because others have already said it, sometimes narrowed down the interaction.

In the villages in southern Chad in general the village chief was informed by us on beforehand and he had informed people of our coming. While in the south we visited an average of two villages a day. When we arrived the chief and important men would gather, a lot of women residing a little bit backwards. Sometimes over a 70 people gathered. Undertaking community interviews demands a very different style of working than with the earlier mentioned groups. Even though these groups can also be identified as natural groups, they were very large to work with. After hearing the villages chiefs and prudently widening our perspectives towards the other men present, after a while we excused ourselves for taking so much of their time, thanked them for their openness and asked if ‘since our topic was for a large part about women’: if we could talk to the women for a while before we left. When this happened the men usually left us at ease with the women. In general community interviews in social research are more than other group interviews built around the assumption of responsibility and knowledge exchange. They belong to the participatory methods that aim to address the unequal power relations inherent to research. (Green & Thorogood 2004: 110). People determined their own priorities in what they presented as problems in their villages and what they sought as most important factors making their girls leave. They asked for our opinions and advise on how they could stop this. There was more of a dialogue than in interviews with the small groups of girls. In general community interviews were a very enriching research method, offering a lot of data from different perspectives in a short period of time. The openness of the communities concerned and their interest to exchange with us have made this a very fruitful venture. Furthermore they served as a method of data-triangulation (Green & Thorogood 2004: 208). In the process of (child-) migration this type of data-comparison is considered of added value, to understand the social relations and negotiations behind the mobility of the young. (Thorsen at AEGIS conference 13th of July 2007)

**Difficulties**

Undertaking research in N’Djamena was not an easy task. Not always did the streets feel safe as in the case of the tumult around Arche de Zoë, a French NGO leading to a scandal in Chad as they were

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47 A quite normal habit when things are discussed in the village. Nowadays also especially related to the work of rural NGO’s and local churches. For example in Ter village (Tandjilé) when we had talked for a while on the outmigration of girls we were stunned to see that the group of people ‘spontaneously’ split itself to formulate answers in small groups. 2 groups of elder men, 3 groups of men of mixed ages and two groups of women of mixed ages came back after ten minutes to formulate their development-solutions to the problem. It was a very funny experience, but also an upsetting one, when they shaped their solutions in terms of small development projects. While we had come without such objectives or money they hoped for us to fix the well or to improve teaching for example.


49 D. Thorsen was speaking at the AEGIS European Conference on African Studies in Leiden from 11 to 14 July 2007.
accused of the trafficking of children. A little after this happened and the staff of the NGO was put to prison, the scandal grew in the media leading to riots against foreigners, especially around the 14th of November 2007. Likewise there was unrest and difficulty to displace ourselves when students and shopkeepers held strikes. The later was obliged by the president and the unrest was caused when soldiers harassed the shop-keepers that kept their shops open. The largest difficulty was that when something like this was going on in N’Djamena, there were so many rumours about the reason that it was very difficult to establish first what was going on where and second, what the reasons were and therefore what the consequences could be.

Socio-political sentiments were also very difficult to escape in the setting of doing research in N’Djamena. I tried avoiding accepting dichotomies in thinking about different population groups, and saw a lot of border-crossing solidarity. Still these political sentiments were inescapable and did sometimes precisely explain people’s realities and the differential social environments and opportunities they engaged with. They in fact became very important to this research.

Meeting very poor people and sometimes sick people was the hardest part of this research. With two girls of the Central African Republic I got closely involved in their health seeking behaviour as they were suffering vague but painful complaints. While normally as a group they collected money for medical care I was approached directly with the question for money and gave it to them when I urged them to go and see a doctor while I knew they did not have the money. One of those girls fell severely ill while we were in the South of Chad and she was sent back to the Central African Republic by a larger group of people of the Central African Republic that she normally engaged in and that had gathered money for her. She was, for the first time since the war in CAR send back to her family, most likely to receive local treatment. The other girl remained searching for health, while we at the end of my stay finally encountered the address she could get free medical treatment, as long as she would be open about her being active in prostitution.

It was unclear for most of the girls (in Kabalaye) in this research whether they were HIV positive. In general girls either told me out of themselves that they only had safe sex with customers or that they regularly checked if they had AIDS. Others just did not know and some did not want to know. At least four young women encountered during this research suffered severe abdominal pains and had operations to their wombs and ovaries during the six months I was there. Since the medical system in Chad fails many people it was very frustrating to see people not getting further, not being explained what they had and spending a lot of money to medication and consults. The alternative however was self-treatment (informal drug market) or asking a choukou for injections.

Not only for medical complaints but also in other situations we were often asked for money and investments in projects. For the girls we worked with we either bought soda’s or brought soap to

50 See for example Chad: French NGO accused of trafficking children, IRIN, 26 October 2007.
51 This was around the fourth of January when the president ordered shops to keep closed out of sympathy with recent and heavy losses of the national army in the east of Chad.
52 Self proclaimed traditional (street) healers in N’Djamena working with herbs etc.
thank them for their help. When I had informants in Kabalaye who had not had breakfast yet at two in the afternoon, and nothing to buy it with we bought them something. It is very hard as a researcher to remain out of these personal issues in N'Djamena. It can make the researcher question the ethics of the contact, the value of friendships and the level of interference, engagement and dependency. In the end however I do not have the feeling this small forms of assistance interfered with the data obtained, it actually gave more insight into health seeking behaviour and the establishment of weak ties by girls in difficult positions. Furthermore it would have been unethical not to interfere in this modest matter.

There was one young woman we helped a lot with medical treatment, and quite often bought something to eat. On our very last appointment to say goodbye she and her friend shared their lunch with us. It were a few small cucumbers carefully cleaned and served with a little mayonnaise. This was their breakfast and lunch in one, so gently shared with 5 persons! Such confronting issues were part of every day life and research in N'Djamena and made it very difficult for a researcher to not become engaged and emotionally affected.
4. A history to landscapes

Introduction

The girls and young women in N’Djamena this research is about originate from different backgrounds. Even when they descend from the same village, their parents might have had totally different positions and the girls themselves different experiences of growing up in the village. Some for example have finished primary school while others have been kept home to help their mothers. The young women centred in Kabalaye in this research in the same manner have known different experiences as well as commonalities during their lives. What the informants all have in common is that they grew up or arrived in Chad in a specific period. A period of promise and disappointments, a period of sometimes seemingly stabilization and careful steps towards democratization but also a period of continuing politico-military unrest, economic deprivation and a lack of basic human rights in the last decade. Although being referred to by others as la génération consiente, the children of nivaquine or they somehow praise Déby’s democracy, they perhaps dream of the same adventures and modernity many other girls in third world countries might. Yet they grew up in specific environments that need to be understood when one tries to come to terms with their experiences in the urban landscape in the current phase of their lives. To enable such an understanding specific aspects of Chadian history will be elaborated on here. This chapter will consecutively explore the socio-political climate in the south of Chad and its most important developments. Secondly the history and characteristics of N’Djamena as it has developed during time towards its present urban

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53 La generation consiente refers to the self-conscious generation these girls belong to according to other southerners, as they see the girls looking for clothes and consumer goods in town. In the expression ‘the children of nivaquine’, nivaquine is referring to modernity, indicating their migration is a modern phenomenon. The meaning of the democracy of Déby is explained in the first chapter of this thesis.
landscape will be explored. Lastly attention will be paid to the changing nature of girlhood and womanhood in Chad during time, as discussed by women and girls themselves.

**Southern Chad**

The history of Chad as a nation is complex, as the country is composed out of very diverse population groups with diverse histories and cultures. General estimates speak of around 10 million people living in the country currently. Approximately of which officially around 700,000 people live in N’Djamena. The last census in Chad was carried out in 1993, according to which the largest population groups were the following: 27.7% Sara, 12.3% Arab, 11.5% Mayo-Kebbi, 9% Kanem-Bornou, 8.7% Ouaddai, 6.7% Hadjerai, 6.5% Tandjile, 6.3% Gorane, 4.7% Fritri-Batha, other 6.4%, unknown 0.3%. The southern girls in this research belong to either one of the sub-Sara or Tandjile groups. Although officially 12.3% of the population was classified as of Arab ethnicity, according to the same census 51.3% of the population was classified as Muslim, while 34.3% was labelled Christian. The Sara and Tandjile are predominantly Christian.

Chad is a landlocked, politically unstable and drought-challenged country. The UNDP’s Human Development Index 2007/2008 listed Chad in 170th position on a list of 177 (UNDP 2007-2008). Until recently the Chadian economy was dependent on the export of cattle and cotton foremost, while only since the end of 2003 oil started to be exported. Although Chad’s GDP has risen since then (30% in 2004, see Erikson 2005:5), the money, unlike the aims of the investors in the oil-project, does not reach Chadian citizens but has gone into the defence budget. While the few people closely related to the political pouvoir have seen their income rising, this behaviour of selective accumulation was able to generate new political fragmentation in an already politically unstable climate. (Van Dijk 2007)

Although northern fractions are forming the main rebellion-opposition since the early nineteen eighties, Chad’s (contemporary) history of political disunity is normally presented as a north-south conflict only. The dichotomy between north and south is deeply engrained in Chadian history and forms a topic one can not avoid when explaining current developments in Chad.

The south of Chad has in the 19th century functioned foremost as a reserve of slaves for the slave-raiding kingdoms of the Wadai, Kanem Bornou and Barguimi of the north of present Chad and Sudan. These trans-Saharan trading peoples traded in gold and salt and raided for slaves amongst the southern, so called animistic communities. This history has deeply influenced the mentalities in Chad, as in Sudan, Niger and Mali. It is a heritage through which particular northern groups (nomads) still feel superior towards the southern sedentary communities in Chad. (Erikson 2005:25)

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55 The Human Development Index aims to indicate achievements in terms of life expectancy, educational attainment and adjusted real income. (UNDP 2007/2008)
Ascribed or experienced feelings of inferiority still affect some peoples from the south today. The division was also clearly fed and reinforced by the French colonial system at several periods in time “through the constant use of contrasting terminology: chrétien (Christian) versus musulman (Muslim); sudiste (southerner) versus nordiste (northerner); salarié (salaried) or cultivateur (fieldworker) versus éleveur (livestock breeder); descendants d’esclaves (descendants of slaves) versus notables, évolués (cultured) and fétichists versus theists; and the Communist PPT versus the “loyal northern parties.” (Azevedo 1998: 38 referring to the work of Lemarchand) Although there is a general tendency to state that French colonialism delivered more development to the south, because they preferred the southern population, while the northern population of Chad was so resistant, the French actually looked up to the north and their Arab culture. The fact that they encountered less resistance in the south while they did not get hold in the north made the French invest more in the south but also exposed southerners much more to forms of submission and exploitation.

Towards the end of the slave-raiding period, missionaries and later the French colonials got grip in southern Chad much easier than in the north. Subject to civilising and educating missions of the churches and later the colonial regime the south developed itself differently than the north of Chad, where colonial governance, modern education, as well as for example healthcare delivery met a lot of resistance and hardly established itself. The Muslim and Arabic-speaking peoples from northern Chad refused military recruitments and forced labour… “they considered manual labour to be degrading...in pre-colonial times, slaves and captives did this work for them.” (Azevedo 1998: 22) The French colonials had a totally different view of southerners, as socially less developed than the Muslim population, but also seeing them as docile and passive. (Ibid.) In the south a lot of labourers were forcibly recruited, especially for the construction of the Brazzaville railway. As another type of forced labour, local farmers were obliged to start cultivating cotton from 1930’s on (Arditi 1999: 562). In southern Chad these types of forced labour and a forced taxation that was much higher than for example in Cameroon caused many people to migrate, either internally-to places that were less accessible to the French- or to neighbouring countries.

With the presence of missionaries and a colonial administration in the South, modern schooling was able to get foot in the south, a development which led to a gradual appreciation of learning French. This eased the entrance into the colonial administrative system in N’Djamena of southern people around the period of independence when compared to the northern part of the population. A Sara, François Tombalbaye, in the period before independence appeared the most capable to mobilise a lot of voters. But the rise to power of Tombalbaye’s PPT (Parti Progressiste Tchadien) was not so much because he was leading a unified French educated group that was now ready to govern the country. Foremost the not so naturally united, but rather fragmented Sara

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56 The colony had to maintain itself and to produce the money therefore. France saw the production of cotton as one of the only means to achieve this in present day Chad, that in the early twentieth century was part of French Equatorial Africa. Forced labour to achieve the obliged amounts of production was rule rather than exception. Often the growing of sufficient food groups had to be neglected because of it.
formed one front due to their shared experience of forced cotton cultivation, forced labour and their wish to end these characteristics of colonization.

After his election however the Sara were soon carrying out obliged cotton cultivation for their own president and did not oppose him as keeping him as a friend meant they now had the access to better positions in society. Nevertheless not long after his coming to power the president became repressive and one-party system was declared (1962). While in the first independence cabinet a lot of Muslims were represented, Tombalbaye soon lost almost all sympathy that some of the northern population had for him and he maddened the northern opposition that was excluded from political opposition as early as 1962. With an increase of the taxes in 1965 the tax on cattle and persons was heightened without explanation. This was able to create the first revolt in Mangalme. In this town in the Batha prefecture (north-central Chad) the Mubi (or Mubu) population killed 10 government officials (from the south foremost). In revenge, in 1966 the government seemed to have ordered the killing of 500 Mubi. (Azevedo 1998:46) Rebellions in other parts of the north of Chad followed, leading to the establishment of the FROLINAT (Front National de Liberation) in 1969. But the FROLINAT, initiator of a guerrilla campaign on the countryside against the southern regime was internally divided from the start and already in 1969 was split up in 3 groups. (Ibid.)

Being contested by northern rebels, the president started to loose ground in the South as well, when he imposed an 'africanization policy' inspired by Mobutu Sese Sekou’s “cultural revolution” of 1968. This cultural revolution was accompanied by a forced 'traditional' initiation for all Sara, including elder people (among whom politicians and scientists) and was able to generate a lot of 'internal' resistance against Tombalbaye. (Azevedo 1998) Opposition grew and in 1975 the first president of Chad was murdered. General Malloum one of the people behind the coup, came to power in a fragmented nation. He was unable to achieve stability in the country where the northern rebellions were actively backed by Libya. In 1978, to gain the favour of some of the guerrilla’s Malloum appointed Habré, one of his greatest opponents as prime minister. (Azevedo 1998: 52). This was an attempt at finding a more acceptable political system for involving the northerners in the sharing of the benefits from power. Habré accepted, and this aroused a lot of hopes. (Azam 2002:23) Within a year however, Malloum found his own army and those backing up Habré, fighting against each other in N’Djamena.

With the unrest that broke out in N’Djamena in 1979 a large part of the southern population fled back to southern villages. While their own lives were unsafe in the capital, in southern towns a lot of Muslims were murdered as an act of retaliation. (Posthumus 2000: 800 Muslims were killed in Moundou). The presence of so many people from N’Djamena was able to put a lot of stress on the local resources in villages in the south. In the same period Codo-militias came into existence in the south of Chad. (Codo’s is an abbreviation of ‘commando’s’: diversified rebel groups of southern rebels who lived of the local populations in villages in some localities up till the nineteen nineties). While the government forces of Habré and later Déby tried to capture these codo’s there existed a large
insecurity for 'normal' people in the south and cultivation was a dangerous undertaking in these periods. Many young men from the south fled as they would easily be identified as codo’s by the military while they were not, or risked being forcibly recruited by the codo’s. A lot of people fled to Cameroon or the smaller towns of southern Chad.

Although political violence before 1979 mainly took place in northern Chad, after 1979 this deeply penetrated the south, where massacres were perpetrated in 1983-1986 by the Habré government. In 1992-1999 the south faced such repression again by the Déby government. In the process many villages were completely depopulated, large amounts of innocent villagers died. “Buijtenhuijs does not hesitate to characterize these massacres as “genocidal”. He estimates that more than 1000 southerners have been killed every year during those two episodes.” (Azam 2002: 24-25 referring to Buijtenhuijs 1998)

The insecurities in the south differed per region and per period. In Mowkolo (Tandjilé) villagers spoke of 1994 as being the year in which people that had fled to southern towns to feel safer, returned home. In the village of Beduigrui the village chief told that as a consequence of famine a lot of young men left the village in 1984, and soon after that they experienced threats from the rebels (codo’s) and the national army. It was a situation that caused a lot of young men to flee, as they were easily suspected of being a codo by the army meaning they would be killed, or forced to become one of them by the codo’s. In that period girls did not migrate the chief said: only with the return of this youth...slowly the girls got triggered into the movement to Cameroon or Chadian towns as well. Until 1991-1992 the village chef said, they had felt insecure in their village, he knew of regions in the South where this insecurity continued just until 2001-2002. In conducting an interview with a woman at Bedigrui market she elaborated: “Look, at this place. In 1985 a lot of people have been killed by the codos. They took everything of the traders, We were frightened and we stayed in the fields. Later we came and looked. They had killed all Muslims57 and all the people that were on the market. We went back in the night to bury all the bodies. The next day the national army came. We were very frightened. They did not find any signs (of what had taken place) and left. The codos too had left. All young men either fled or had already fled.” (Bedigrui, Mandoul 12-12-07)

Parallel to these violent developments, cotton prices on the world market fell and local famines had place partly due to the insecurities which made it hard to plant and yield in time for southern farmers. In the meanwhile a ‘contest over land’ grew as the south, especially since the last two decades countered an increasing descending of cattle-holders in search for grazing lands. The interaction between cattle-holders and farmers in the south is not new but can be said to have increased in impact foremost because of the politicization of this potential conflict. It is important to explore this issue here because quite some parents see this movement as explanatory for the exodus of their youth, furthermore it paints the background to the area the largest group in this research comes from.

57 Traders in this region, also on local markets today are for a large part Muslim.
Already in the colonial period, starting with the period that taxes were being levied on the Chadian population and therefore the production of market crops became attractive but was also forced upon southerners in Chad, Muslim-(especially foreign traders) settled down in southern Chadian cities, beginning commercial and transporting businesses. Among them were most importantly Hausa, Kanuri and Arabs.(Arditi 1993, & Arditi 1999: 571) In other ways, through transhumance, southern areas were also visited by northern nomads as they were looking for greener pastures in the dry season. This movement could go as far as up to the north of the Central African Republic. Yet it was only since the 1970's that the greener pastures of the South became more accessible to northern nomads while before the routes of nomads were more or less confined to the Sahelian-zone because in the south sleeping-sickness prevailed: destructive to ones cattle. In the nineteen seventies, due to the disappearance of sleeping sickness in the south and a period of severe droughts in the Sahel, many nomads went further south. It concerned foremost the Arabs of the Batha and the Ouaddai who were finding too little water in their own area. They had the habit of moving south only in October, when the southern population would already have their yields in and the nomad’s cows could pass and would at the same time fertilize the land. Specifically associated with these movements where the Peul and Arab herders (among the last the Missriye are well known in the area). Though there seemed to be a period of natural cohabitation, conflicts between nomads and peasants soon started to dominate the scene as southerners experienced that their crops were being destroyed by the cows of nomads.

In the early nineteen eighties the “Gourane” were the new Arabs coming down to the South. As closely related to the political pouvoir of the time (Habré was a Gourane) they suddenly came to fill all administrative and juridical posts in the South, giving the southern population a feeling of powerlessness vis à vis the law and state and it was felt like an occupation by many. (Arditi 1999: 571) The same feeling has been felt most likely by northerners when the southerners were ruling northern Chad from 1960 to 1975. In the same period all the customs where classified as having close ties to the political pouvoir and an ambiance in favour of Arab tradesman and nomads prevailed in the southern region. Both tradesman and nomads intensely practised border-crossing trade, something that especially accumulated further with the Structural Adjustments of the 1990’s. They profited form being closely connected to the political pouvoir and were able to bypass rules and regulations. This type of close relationships between Muslim tradesman and the customs and local authorities has remained existent with the coming to power of the current president Déby.

During the last decades tension between nomads and peasants severely accumulated. Aggravating these tensions is that southerners claim that the nomads have been armed by the political pouvoir, as those in power benefit almost directly from the close ties with these traders and trading nomads. Commercial cattle-traders have settled almost permanently in southern Chad and together with a local, rural accumulation of the population and a decline in cotton prices this leads to miserable experiences for peoples originating from the south.
Some southern adults in N'Djamena closely related the move of their community’s children to the town of N'Djamena directly to the presence of conflict between nomads and peasants in the south. The following fragment shows the deepness of their feelings. Although the two chiefs during this conversation held a very political discourse, especially to convince me, as an outsider, of the seriousness of what was going on, their everyday life also seemed to be highly influenced by their knowledge and experience of this conflict.

This is a fragment of a meeting with a community chief and a chief of the block in a peripheral district of N'Djamena. Both originate from Mandoul in southern Chad. For the meeting the chiefs had gathered around 40 girls for us, but their discourse was so dominant that they hardly let them speak.

“The Chef de Carré (CC/ chief of the block) is a former soldier and has travelled a lot. He begins pleading:

“We, we are suffering. He states this often and speaks about ‘we’ as the people from the South (les sudistes). We are strangers in the South, in our villages. Our houses are destroyed, our customs are destroyed. The intimidations. All since the war. Before 1978 you would not find a child from southerners in N’Djamena. The children did well in school or they studied in Europe. At this moment it is war, c'est la souffrance.”

Me: Does that mean that returning to the villages is not a possibility for the young people that are here now?

CC: “They come and go and they come and go, but we are strangers over there. The conflicts between cattle-herders and farmers are big. You don’t find a southerner in the administration there, there is no one that can defend them. When they work on the fields and if their parents manage to cultivate something…..then the cattle of the nomads come and destroy it.

To become someone in life freedom is essential. Freedom and security are essential. But what can we do? It is not easy.”

[....]

Me: Are there regional differences within the south when it comes to the problems you mention?

CC: “It is the war. In the whole south it is the same. Everything gets destroyed. Before the 1970’s you would not find a child of the south here. When something small happens nowadays, back in the villages, the nomads bring their arms with them, they fight. The young flee.

[....]

Me: Have you chiefs been presenting your problems to local authorities in the south?

Chef de Race:”When we speak they kill us.”

Me: You told us that the young people flee the situation in the villages, why don’t their parents flee to N'Djamena?

CR: “They will not be able to find work here, to find food for their family.”

Me: Are the oil-fields around Doba also attracting youngsters like N'Djamena does?

CR: “It are mostly Northerners that find work there”

[....]

CC: “The details are not your problem. You have heard the story by now. All the girls would tell you the same story. You have been speaking about speaking up. But who will we speak to? Our mouths are closed.” [‘Group’ interview N’Djamena/ two chiefs 09-09-2007]"
While the conflict is very real (the topic was extensively treated at a national conference on as early as 1993) only four of the bonnes in interviewed mentioned the reason of this type of conflict as the direct reason for their migration. Missing maintenance by the parents (to continue schooling), to see the city, to find clothes or the loss of one or two parents are the most often the reasons young people gave for coming to N'Djamena. Of course the poverty of their parents might have been closely related to this situation of recurring conflict in the south.\textsuperscript{58}

Due to the above mentioned conflicts and all the political contest there has recently a lot of debate going on whether we can speak of a north and south in Chad. (cf. Al-Mouna publication in 1996: “Conflit Nord-Sud” Mythe ou Réalité) The contradiction north-south is often mentioned to explain the countries conflicts and difficulties. The division is debated and contested and often too easily referred to. But is a conflict very real in the eyes of normal people, whose memories of the past colour how they look at their surroundings nowadays and explain inequality, conflict and sympathies. Nevertheless the everyday life is also full of alliances, in which people try to approach the other in the others own language, share taxi’s together, work together, respect each others religious holidays and adore the same national artist together. Nevertheless friction is part of everyday life in N'Djamena. With a focus on this town and its short history as the capital of an independent country this chapter will continue.

N'Djamena

A city that forms the centre of a country with such a turbulent history, must be deeply influenced by these developments. As a colonial town N’Djamena consisted of segregated quarters: those where the French resided, those were administration and commerce were concentrated and those where the indigenous people resided. Arabic in the beginning was the vehicular language according to Arditi (1993: 186) for the capital attracted a lot of Kanouri and Arabs in its initial phase. French however was the language of the French administration. When the people of southern Chad more easily than the northern population entered the French educational system, by the time of independence they formed the largest group ‘eligible’ candidates to take over the countries politics and administration. Tombalbaye was a Southern president and to minimise any opposition, as mentioned earlier in 1962 he declared the country a one-party state “and began systematically excluding his political opponents from the regime, many of whom were from the north”. (Azevedo 1998: 47). “While few prominent southerners dared to criticize the president in public for their children's access to leadership positions.”(ibid.)

Between 1962 and today, a complete reversal of the political economy in Chad has taken place, of which N’Djamena forms the centre stage. The complete opposite situation one finds

\textsuperscript{58} These conflicts seems at the moment especially concentrated in the areas we did research (Mandoul and Tandjilè). It was prevalent also around Bébidja as this regions was often in the news, but a lot of people claimed that in other regions there was a less conflicting co-habitation between cattle-herders and farmers in other parts of Chad.
nowadays in the country. All important (political) positions are divided among those close to the small clan of the current president, president Déby. Most Sara (largest southern ethnic group) feel completely excluded of political voice and the countries resources, causing a lot of reversed sentiments; southern people are now faced with how many people in the north felt in the nineteen sixties. In the period that lays in between a lot has happened that has influenced the daily interaction between people from the north and people from the south of Chad as was mentioned in the previous paragraph. Internal political unrest and international interferences caused a civil war that started of in the east of Chad in 1965 as tax revolt and consecutively rebel movements were formed in the north, backed up by Libya and Sudan. In 1975 Tombalbaye was assassinated in a coup d’etat by junior officers and General Félix Malloum came to power. In 1979 a bloody phase of the civil war took of when Habré, in an attempt of national reconciliation in 1978 had been appointed prime-minister but whose forces clashed with those of Malloum on February 12, 1979.

Between February 12 and February 25 1979 more than a thousand southern people were killed in N’Djamena. “At least eighty thousand citizens, mostly Sara from N’Djamena” had fled. (Azevedo 1998:53). Azevedo reports that this outburst of violence left the capital a ‘Muslim ghost town.’ (1998:53). In the same period in southern Chad a lot of Muslims where killed in small towns. 

“We all fled from Moursal (quarter of N’Djamena) to the village (in Logone Oriental) in 1979. When we arrived there people complained about the large influx of urban family members. At night the young people of the village would dance and and sing “our brothers of N’Djamena have arrived, but we have no food to feed them”. It was only later, when the insecurities came to that place far in the South that people understood what the situation had been like for us in N’Djamena and they came and apologized. My father went back in 1984 when a friend in N’Djamena said he could take up his former job, this was when Habré realized he needed educated people of the South to make the country work. My father went, but our family stayed. My mother, who had started a small trading business between a town in the South and the village, always inquired with acquaintances of my father if they had any news. It was a year later that my father told us we could come back to live in Moursal again.”

(Story of A.)

In the process of slow return to N’Djamena a division in the city between north and south was reinforced. Nowadays to a large extent it can be said that southerners reside in the more south and eastern parts on N’Djamena. Of course there are some quarters of town that are more mixed than others.

As Chad’s history is full of leaders that divided the countries resources amongst their kin and close-relations, during history little money has been invested in the countries development. Even, now while the country is finally pumping and exporting oil, Déby claims the money that according to the contract with the World Bank (the main investor in the oil-pipeline to Cameroun) should be reserved for the countries development and future generations can not be reserved for that purpose. Most of the nations modest wealth has been invested in arms and military mobilization as the president is under threat form eastern rebels and therefore claims he needs the money to protect the nation. Amidst a legacy of military leadership, under the influence of the French Déby, soon after he came to power promised a move towards multi party democracy and civilian rule. This promise took
shape only three years later when in 1993 the National Souvereign conference was held. Political parties were now allowed next to the presidents Mouvement Patriotique de Salut (MPS). (Azevedo 1998: 62) The southern and northern oppositions were fragmented politically however, which helped Déby to win the elections in 1996, although questions were raised about the reliability of these elections. By adjusting the law the president achieved to be able to be elected once more after the elections in 2001, namely in 2006, although these last elections were openly boycotted by the opposition. The support from even his own people is not stable, nor secure. Forming part of the Zaghawa people from eastern Chad that forms only 2% of the population, people close to the president have profited from presidential patronage and dominate all ranks of government and armed forces. (Massey 2006) Nevertheless even his close affiliates are diminishing their loyalty to this president as they claim the oil benefits are being invested directly in the president’s immediate family. Especially the north-east of Chad is very unstable and in the last 2 years two coup attempts have been undertaken by rebels that were able to enter N'Djamena and fight in town. The political climate has become more and more tensed, very visible in the dramatic military parades and display surrounding all the presidents’ movements. In absence of town, even simple civilians were not allowed to cross the river Chari by canoe because the presidential gardens were close. Déby fears to be overthrown in his absence, by anyone who will be able to set foot in the Palace.

Daily life in N’Djamena
The current political situation, although promises of democratization echoed through the country in the 1990's for a while, remains fragile and “the greatest impediment to democratization in Chad is the widespread insecurity which renders meaningless the formal exercise of political freedom. Though the military seems pervasive, it is fragmented, unorganised, undisciplined, and uncontrollable.” (Milles 1995: 57) Strikes among civil servants are recurrent leaving a lot of the universities, schools and hospitals non-functioning for months every year. There is unrest over the spread of oil wealth. In daily life in N’Djamena the political unrest and inequality is mostly translated in the upcoming richness of those close to the president and the maintenance of resources in the hands of Muslim traders. In the meantime others, both northern and southern civilians, encounter impoverishment, lawlessness and anarchy in everyday life. The largest amount of the population has no access to clean water, electricity, or jobs. As a consequence of a continuum of local conflict and insecurity as well as recurrent droughts in different parts of the country since 1965, N’Djamena has attracted in various periods large amounts of Internally Displaced People and rural migrants from different parts of the country, often in search for security as well as economic opportunities. These particular types of migration have resulted into a creation of large peripheral quarters of people having a hard time integrating in the 'formal' urban economy of N’Djamena. They have changed the landscape of N’Djamena both in geographic terms as well as through their increasing participation and therefore
growing 'informal' economy in the capital. (De Bruijn 2007: 265 referring to Cloutier & Sy 1993).

Many people seek for opportunities in daily life but many people are also without initiative, paralyzed by the recognition of their marginal position. Nevertheless there are all sorts of pathways in-between these seemingly two different cityscapes of informality and marginality and the 'formal manoeuvres' of the better placed. Some people with relatively high incomes are closely engaged with smuggling through their connections, while smuggling on their bodies and chased after poor women and boys are part of the scenery. Thus as others have argued the formal and informal activities in this 'unruly' town are intertwined. (cf. Roitman 2004) Because of its unruliness, and because of the volatility: even those with jobs are not secure of an income tomorrow: for a coup-attempt might overnight destroy offices and the population might plunder if the occasion allows for it. Those on the government’s pay list are lucky if they are paid in time, paid at all actually. Young people find no access but pay bribes continuously to find jobs in the civil services. Only close ties to the political pouvoir helps one find study-bourses. In such a context a salary is seen as a privilege and not as remuneration for work done. (Roitman 2004: 208) Seizure and raiding by the state or its unpaid national army are features of every day life. One encounters seizure by the customs when one travels, on the market or in the aftermath of a coup attempt. On the last occasion that this happened (February 2008) whole parts of town were appropriated by the president and destroyed for so called reasons of national security. The fact that the president had claimed the state of emergency legitimized these repressive actions through which many people lost their houses in Sabangali, Gardole and Chagoua. Déguerpissement or clearance (by the state or somebody claiming to represent the state) is a word that echoes through N’Djamena. On a day Gua (19) went to the market she had to fight for meat for the household she was working in as there was only one man with a table of meat on Dembe market. It was a day when the president has called on a strike out of sympathy with the military loses in the east of Chad. This was even on the radio openly compared with the dictatorial behaviour of Habré, the previous president, as he used to mobilize people to demonstrate for issues they did not support. Chantal (27) once was selling fried potatoes close to a school in a quiet part of town. It took her a whole lot to save for this small trade; to buy good oil, a pan and potatoes. One day a group of soldiers asked her for a large amount of fried potatoes, took it and did not pay, but kicked her pan with hot oil to the ground. She lost so much stock of oil and potatoes that she was unable to continue her petty-trade. Not long after that happened, she tells in retrospective, she was almost drawn to the streets; to sleep with men to at least have some income. On the market police raid the stock of ambulant traders (mostly women selling carrots, tomatoes and salad) because they are not allowed to trade there. It is a sad scene the aggressiveness the police portray and the one man whose table of meat is loaded upon the police’s Toyota with force. The man starts arguing with the police but it is a lost battle. As soon as the police troop leaves around the corner however most traders settle down again. People in town commented heavily on such recurring actions as they claimed these market women provided often the only income for large families. As much as the ambulant vendors
calculate the risk of seizure in, in their daily trading practices, they build up negative experiences towards a part of the state (in fact the only visible part of a state) in Chad. They accumulate anger and hate against a specific part of the population.

Roitman (2004) describes for the larger region (Chad Basin) how people in such conditions develop their own perspectives on democracy and live and survive accordingly. A repressive and violent regime might move people to the margins of a society, but in this margin they develop means to cope. In fact, as already stated, the margins have become the centre stage to so many people living in N'Djamena that one needs to question the applicability of such a term. As so many families are in despair and children (boys) move to the streets (De Bruijn2007) this becomes a feature of society and no longer the exception.

Now although the population claims the countries resources end up only in specific peoples pockets, the girls and young women this research is about navigate between the landscapes of rulers and subjects, wealth and poor and predominantly Muslim, Zaghawa or others able to maintain themselves through political ties and the marginalized in this political economy. In the process they redistribute the countries wealth one could say, although on a very modest scale. The work in northern households is by parents from the south often referred to as a continuum of slavery. Some ethnic groups are known to still call some of the southern girls and boys, working in their household slaves. Others out of religious piety try to treat these youngsters as well as they can. This part of the political economy is complex.

In the following chapter it becomes clear that especially rural youth and urban prostitutes have a lot of reason to focus on the Muslim part of the population (in fact only the richer part of it) as there within they have located economic niches. Some Muslim families have been accumulating means and are able to attract more than one and sometimes even three or four domestic workers in one household. In southern households were women have also started working there is often a high need for the help of a niece or aunt in their household. Nevertheless salaries of many southern people (especially the civil servants) do not allow to renumerate the domestic workers sufficiently to maintain them. This contributes to the movement of girls that are looking for better circumstances to seek their way up to northern parts of town.

The dichotomy found in N’Djamena, being at once a wasteland and opportunity-landscape for girls coming from the south and from the Central African Republic shimmer through all the descriptions in this research. They are not easily understood but need to be central to the understanding of what girl- and young women migrants do in N’Djamena.

**Changing perceptions: Being a girl in Chad**

“Before 1979 a girl would never come to N’Djamena alone, she would only come herey if she would be driven in side by side to her husband” an old lady originating from Dono Manga told. Although her region of
origin is generally known as the region of adventurers, until recently it were especially men who were engaged in searching new places to make a living and they used to venture out by foot. “Before these times going on adventure was for men” a man in a village close to Dono Manga claimed. Nowadays young girls from their region are coming en masse to N’Djamena. Though many of them come as unmarried girls, in search for adventure and a trousseau, especially from this region also married young women seem to come. The first group especially hopes to find a married sister or aunt in N’Djamena that they wish to visit in the hope to be able to return with something. Because life is hard on them they say, and they hope to return with notebooks and clothes. The latter group are the youngest brides in polygamous households and feel liminal in these spheres of co-wives. The most recurring problem is when such a girl has been asked to marry (by paying the bride wealth by the prospective husband) but she is unable to find her trousseau. A man in a village close to Dono Manga explains it as follows:

“If I had three wives and two of them had their trousseau and one did not manage to find it yet she can borrow from her co-wives. But when a problem then occurs, she won’t even listen any more to her husband.”

A young girl in the same village explains it partly the same:

“In the past, people cultivated millet, peanuts and cotton and they chose a day to sell what they had. That day they would be able to go to the market and buy what they needed. Nowadays we work on the land next to the men. We try to sell what we yield, but it does not give you any money. When you are in love and you do not have a small cup to offer your friend to drink, that is a shame for you. You can borrow it from a friend but people will start talking about you. It are those small things that push girls to go. Since the cotton does not yield any money it has become very difficult.”

An older lady added:

“It is poverty that pushes them, you have to be clear about this.”

According to many in the village this movement of girls and young women started in 1998. The year that none of the rural households managed to sell the cotton they had yielded. At that time nobody had money and a man explained: “In such a moment one has to be a man to maintain your woman with you.” A girl later said: “If a woman’s stomach is not filled, she will go and look for another man.” It seems clear that the population of this village clearly related the movement of their girls and young women to a degradation of rural life in the last decade and the stress this had put on the relationship between men and women. In this meeting -unlike in the other southern villages- the men were almost confronting the women as if they wanted to hear from them as well why they were leaving.

It was not only poverty however pushing the girls to the city, as some women acknowledged: “Sometimes a girl is sent by her parents in N’Djamena, to go to the village to celebrate Christmas. Such a girl shines. She has been active in commerce and had been able to take care of herself. The other girls want the same. So it is not only for the trousseau that they leave.”

“In the past people were not yet open. A small girl like that could walk naked until she had 5 years of age without problems. The yields were really abundant. A woman did not know anything. We ate and prepared with calabashes of 5 cfa! Nowadays all the girls want clothes, school and soap. And the yields are only little, not like before.”
Also the influence of opening up to the wider world with its consumer goods and promotion of schooling was associated with allowing for a more demanding social group of girls in society. The past in these stories is idealized, while in other encounters people told about the political unrest that affected their region as well during the 1980's and 1990's. It seemed they did not link up directly these pasts’ events to the movement of girls, while in another close-by village people incorporated those stories more in the explanation of why girls had started to move. Seeing others return to the village in 1994, that had earlier fled local unrest, was said to be a specific motor behind the movement of girls. “When some women came back that had been trading in Kelo after they had fled from the villages, they brought back the 'good'. Others saw this and wanted the same.”

From the villages around Bedigrui the discourse on he mobility of the young were foremost related to present day situations of conflicts with cattle herders. And not much distinction was made in this discourse between the mobility of girls and boys. Elders of the community in Bedigrui where a lot of the bonnes come from see the south as engaged in a continuum of war ever since 1979. Although massacres and repression officially ceded, they feel repressed and faced with 'armed foreigners' in their own home region. They speak of houses being burned down, and their culture being destroyed. In the smallest conflict they tell, the 'foreign/northern' cattle-herders take up their arms and kill. They are provided with this arms by the president and when southerners go and claim their right, in the case when their crops are devastated by a passage of the cows of these herders, they feel completely powerless and marginalized. The south is not represented in the southern administration they feel. It is because of that, that the young from their region flee, they say. Their parents work hard to cultivate something, then the cows come, and the whole stock for that year is ruined. Then they come with guns. The young flee this confrontation.

Although it became quite normal in this area that girls leave too, there is quite some concern about the diseases and pregnancies girls return with to the villages. A man in Dono Manga said there were two types of bonnes: “those that bring home the diseases of men, and normal bonnes.” The village of Bewala has been receiving 7 infants from girls and young women working in N'Djamena. The grandparents are taking care of them.

In general the mobility of girls towards N'Djamena was able to generate quite some debate especially related to diseases and the birth of children out of wedlock in situations in which girls felt unable to care for them themselves. Although women are considered to be mobile in many communities in Chad, because marriage will take them to another village sooner or later, this type of urban migration was considered new. Older existing constructions of foster-care were not associated with these movements though some comparison and interrelationships are possible. There are a lot of girls that come to urban 'parents' when their rural parents have died or when the urban parents are asked to take care of a niece of a poor rural family. Some of such girls we encountered after a while moved out to live with girls together in a room. Sometimes because the girls came to the city in the assumption to be send to school, like nieces and nephews in the urban household, but were put to
work as domestics. Often also because the girls did not receive (sufficient) remuneration for their work in these households of kin.

There is obviously a large diversity of girls and the way their positions in society are perceived through the eyes of different people. In general the opinion is that earning between 10 000 and 15 000 cfa is quite ok for young girls, but several people have indicated that this is different for those around the age of 16-18 years: “then they realize what they earn is not much, and they will become depressed...........They work,, they eat and fall asleep without worries....but when you are older you have much more worries.” (mother of 3 from Dono Manga, working as a domestic in N’Djamena) The younger generation, by the older women is defined as the ‘conscious generation' indicating that they are very conscious of their appearance. Sometime they are also referred to as the ‘children of nivaquine' indicating they are a new generation closely related to modernity. Nivaquine, one of the drugs against malaria is associated with modernity and the import of western cultures and therefore related to these youngsters behaviour.

To close off what is and will remain an incomplete story, for characterisations of girls in Chad given can never be all inclusive and girlhood is a constantly shifting social construction, this chapter will close with the story of Remaji. The story is not at all representative of all girls/ young women in this study but is able to lay bare some of the important issues related to being a girl in Chad. Consecutively these issues concern foster-care, agency (herself deciding to leave the home of her uncle), missing out on school, returning to N’Djamena to earn money, finding a husband but living separated and having a child back in the village with her mother.

**Remaji**

In fragmented interviews we get to know Remaji, 19 years old, mother of a little girl, coming from Péni. Remaji is the only child of her mother who has left the village. She has four brothers two of whom are married. They all have stayed in the village. She is the youngest. Our contacts were fragmented because, although Remaji worked close by, she was often in a hurry to go back home after work. She used to finish her work around 4 o’clock which is a little earlier than a lot of other girls. She then would wait for her friends who do the same kind of work at to walk home together. They prefer to arrive home (at least a one hour walk) before it gets dark. In the rainy season we often missed her because she would hurry home early after every big rain, to see if her room was still standing.

In the period around Christmas and New Year she hardly turned up at work, as many girls and boys doing the same kind of work she claimed some free time for herself and partied with friends from the same village in their (peripheral) quarters of town, some up to the second week of January. In this period, like many other girls in our research group, Remaji suddenly got her hair done with ‘mesh' (synthetic hair) like every N’Djamenoise that has a little bit of money would normally do. I never saw this before in this group of girls but around the end of December. Normally they do not have the time nor the money to do this, is the most likely explanation.
Remaji came to N’Djamena in February 2007 and was able to pick up her previous job with a family from the south living in Moursal. It was not the first time Remaji came to N’Djamena. As a young girl her paternal uncle came to the village Péni to take her to N’Djamena. He wanted to send her to school but this did not really happen. The wife of her uncle made her work really hard. Sometimes she wouldn’t let Remaji leave to go to school in the morning and sometimes she didn’t give her any food. Remaji quit school because she did not get any food at home.

At this point in the interview Guedengao interfered “It must be her paternal uncle because if he were a maternal uncle he should have told his wife: ‘this is my sister’s child’ [indicating that he should have shown more responsibility for her well-being]. If he were really a good uncle than he would have asked her every day when he came home [from work] if she had gone to school.”

At the age of twelve, Remaji tells us, she had seen that this situation was not good for her and she wanted to go back to her parents in Péni. It was her uncle who helped her pay for the transport. Coming back her parents were angry with the family in N’Djamena. They let her stay with them and she started working next to her mother on the land. She was too old to go back to school she says.

Back in the village the parents of her present day husband saw her. They saw her as a serious girl. They sent a letter to their son, who was working in N’Djamena at that moment. He came home to marry her. She estimates his current age at 35. They got a daughter together and after a while went to N’Djamena, the three of them, to find work. It wasn’t working Remaji told us, her two year old daughter was not happy, she was too much attached to Remaji’s mother in Péni. She went back to bring her daughter to her mother. In the meanwhile her husband travelled on to find work in Cameroon. When Remaji came back to N’Djamena this time, in February 2007, she took up work with the same employer she worked with when her daughter was still there.

She lives in a quarter of Walia. She first had a room with a niece in the compound of her paternal uncle, the same as she stayed with when she was young. The room completely collapsed and now the two girls are renting a room in Walia together. The uncle helps with the rent. At some point he had wanted to send the niece of Remaji (who has now been in N’Djamena for 3 years) back to her village because she did not have any work. But the girl preferred to stay with Remaji and try and find a job.

Remaji is waiting for her husband who had said to pick her up in N’Djamena. He is working in Cameroon but she doesn’t know in which town, nor does she know what kind of work he does, but she suspects he does the same kind of work; the work of ‘boy’. She was married to her husband after he had paid the dowry. This is a traditional marriage. She indicates both that she is waiting for her husband to come and take her to Cameroon, while at the same time she tells us that she would prefer to stay in N’Djamena, where she is closer to her mother when something happens.

After some time we hear that her husband has called her and told her he would now soon come and take her to Cameroon, she indicates that she is willing to follow her husband in his choice. Would she take her two year old girl with her to Cameroon I asked her. She tells me her daughter is accustomed to her grandmother. The day she left with her daughter to N’Djamena the baby cried and didn’t want to leave with her she says. She wanted to stay with her grandmother. In September 2007 it had been seven months that she had not seen her
daughter. Remaji indicated that she would want to but did not have the means. I ask her if she would like to have more children, she answers: ‘If God wants it and if my husband wants it’.

Although Remaji wears small golden earrings in the shape of a mobile telephone (price 400 cfa), she does not have a phone. Her husband announces his calls to one of her cousins, she then goes to the cousin on the agreed time to receive his call. The call he made to tell her that he would now soon come to pick her up was on the 30th of August 2007. In January 2008 Remaji was still working in N’Djamena, her husband had not yet appeared.

On her free day, Sunday, she goes to church. She is a protestant. If it doesn’t rain, after church she visits people, among which her paternal uncle or other family-members and friends. We asked her if we could visit her in Walia where she lived but Remaji was immediately reluctant. She was afraid other girls would create difficulties. She describes the girls from her neighbourhood as arrogant and tells that they do not really understand each other (both literally and behaviour-wise). They are from a different ethnic group my assistant explains, the other girls are from Tandjilé, from Dono Manga.
5. Navigating through multiple landscapes in the city:

Girls appropriating the city?

Introduction
Divers and full of contradiction as the city of N'Djamena is, the girls and young women in this research engage with these urban characteristics in everyday life. In N'Djamena -as in many 'immigrant' contexts- it is very natural for newcomers to seek the proximity of those of the same ethnic group on arrival. It is common to find those that speak the same language but are already settled in the new setting as this is able to “cushion the move” (Moch 2003:431). Nevertheless this 'cushioning' has so far only partly been studied for migrating girls; only adults (most often foster-parents) have been found to cushion their move. However seeking the proximity of peers from the same region is primary part of the strategy of this group of girls and young women, and will be explored further in chapter 6. But the informants interact also very specifically with the diversity and contradictions that form part of N'Djamena. In this chapter this behaviour is explored. In specific ways the girls and young women encountered in N'Djamena were very mobile. Processes of border-crossing and appropriation respectively within and of the urban landscapes were very predominant features of the navigation of the research groups. In different ways they interacted on a daily basis with the towns diversity. Mostly this happened as a consequence of their economic needs, partly also it was related to being fashionable, experienced and clever to interact with the Muslim features of part of N'Djamena's society. Both movements central to this chapter -appropriation and border-
crossings challenge us to see this youth as more mobile than the generation of their ‘parents’ in N'Djamena’s contemporary social diversity. The way they interact with the urban landscapes can sometimes best be understood as a type of appropriation. As a way in which the girls are not just being shaped by the urban structures, but partly shape them themselves. In the process girls and young women give their own meaning to spaces and practices in a city and their behaviour within it. This chapter explores this behaviour as one of the central aspect of their navigation in town.

The scenery
In the previous chapter it became clear that the social stratification of N'Djamena, as in many other towns is visible in its difference between districts. The few affluent are progressively able to build beautiful houses. A relatively new Muslim middle class occupies new spaces and builds large compounds, for example behind hotel Kempinski and beyond Farcha. For the larger part however N'Djamena resembles an impoverished social-economic configuration in which the majority of people try hard to sustain some kind of living; economic and human security both are hard to find and to consolidate. Political and religious divisions strongly influence the urban surface and the workings of social relationships underneath. The outcomes of these can be oppositions as well as alliances and all the social interaction in between. These different types of social interaction will be central to this chapter as it aims to understand the notions of border-crossings and appropriation as central to the urban navigation practised by the research groups.

A focus on appropriation shows how those classified as domestic workers and prostitutes deal with an economically dominant class, religion and language, how they relate to aspects of ‘modernity’, but foremost how they seek to identify and make use of urban-niches. In this period in N'Djamena young girls and boys from the Mandoul and Tandjilé regions in the South of Chad have identified an urban niche that is formed by specific Muslim households that recently have accumulated in amount and in wealth so that they often are able to employ more than one domestic worker. It will be shown that young prostitutes likewise were also oriented for their everyday survival towards the Muslim segments of society in N'Djamena. One of the groups however - the young women of the Central African Republic - seemed much more constrained to one quarter. They engaged much less with the urban fabric and appropriated foremost the small networks of other CAR-women.

59 None of the girls had their own parents in N'Djamena, but often there where those they considered classificatory parents: aunts, uncles or adults from their villages of origin.
60 It is impossible to find these quarters of town on a map of N'Djamena yet.
61 One could argue to what extend these are boundaries...a division exists at least in the way people in N'Djamena speak about the different quarters of town, roughly dividing them in wealthy-poor or Muslim and non-Muslim.
62 These are not all northern households but specifically those closely or more indirect related to the political pouvoir and therefore benefiting from the recent oil-incomes that came into the country since the end of 2003.
Border-crossings, the geography of social-cultural and religious boundaries

As little as one could argue that determined boundaries exist in N’Djamena, they exist in the social imagination, architectural division and the diverse street-ambiances. As much as a north-south dichotomy in town and country is debated, sometimes contested and most often confirmed…the dichotomy definitely exists in the way people approach each other or speak about each other. Yet ‘border’ crossings (physical and social) are prevalent in the city. The girls in this research engage with the internal urban boundaries more than a lot of adults form the south. But not only rural origin girls from the south who live in southern or peripheral parts of town seek their way north (through the axe of searchers/ rue de quarante/ rue des fonctionaires the 40 metre63), people associated with northern parts of town, come down. They do so for example to sell, do business, to govern, to visit or to party. While life in the northern part of town is more inwards directed and more religious and serene at the surface and the streets are male-dominated spaces, large parts of southern N’Djamena are filled with noise, music and ambulant (female) vendors at any time of day. Beer is sold wide in the open and small sachets of liquor and wine are found under the hot sun on small-roadside stalls. In southern N’Djamena especially the quarter of Kabalaye, but also parts of Moursal, Paris Congo, Chagoua and Walia are the places to party. In fact most of the bars and disco’s in these parts of town are closed during Ramadan, as the ‘northern’ clients have normally quite some money to spend and in that period hardly will go out and drink64. A few days before the fasting period ends, southern bar-owners invest in their bars by renewing paint and furniture, giving their wooden bars new allure. The outburst of a new partying season in N’Djamena started in 2007 with the end of the Ramadan and with Christmas and New Year approaching. The ‘leisure’ industry in southern N’Djamena profits clearly from a regular ‘coming down’ of those that are associated with the northern part of the city, mostly men. Yet not only adult men65 that cross town to come to ‘southern’ bars, as this chapter shows. Young people in N’Djamena especially also engage in these types of border crossings.

Regularly on Saturday’s or Sunday’s youth from the northern parts of town hired the restaurant behind which I had a room to have closed parties. In the morning young boys used to arrive and impose their plans on a loud tone towards a servant from the restaurant. From the other side of the wall one could think there was a police raid going on. They spoke Arabic in excited tone is with the (southern) personnel of the restaurant that preferred to speak French and not Arabic. They negotiated the position of tables and chairs and governed the gate to the restaurant where during the day large boxes and a music-installation would be dropped off. Around two am the music started at maximum volume and paused only once during dinner, or when a power-cut necessitated demanding the staff of the restaurant to put on the generator. Already before this hour, in baggy jeans and basketball shirts the boys from the ages of 14 till 16 hung out in the courtyard that,

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63 The different names for the road southern domestics take to the Muslim part of town.
64 Some do however and find in that case a welcome anonymity in southern restaurants and bars when in northern sectors they could not drink and eat and flirt in public during Ramadan.
65 A lot of religious Muslim men one would also never find in hanging out in these areas.
due to the occasion, was completely filled with parked new motors. Slowly girls dropped in as well. Dropped of at the gate by cars they entered the gate alone or with friends decently dressed in large *buibui’s* or under big scarves. In the hallway of the restaurant the girls soon exchanged their veiling outfits for miniskirts, sexy tops, high heels, large earrings and make-up. During the party 50 cents, *Beyoncé* and *Shakira* and a few hits from the Ivory-coast shouted through the speakers. Girls danced, gossiped and hung out. Boys tried to pull them on the dance floor. At ten sharp the music stopped. Girls went home in their *buibui’s* and the boys tried to clean up. Officially no alcoholic beverages were brought in by the young, but small plastic sachets of “visa” vodka mixed perfectly well and unseen in the Coca-cola and Fanta cans they consumed. The owners of the restaurant used to gain 100,000 cfa an evening, by only lending their space and closing their doors for an evening. It is most likely that the boys -originating from the countries present wealthy elite- get the money from their parents or older brothers. It started with a graduation party but consequently practically twice a month more or less the same group of boys and girls turned up to party. The situation of these girls that attained those parties -self-searching, highly make-upped partying girls- form a large contrast with the domestic girls working in the households of their parents my research was about. Though southern girls claimed to want to learn Arabic and wore headscarves, from underneath their veil the well-off northern girls were much more ‘western’ oriented.

Of course the ‘northern’ group of young girls and boys presented here form a small elite that does not represent all adolescents from Northern households. It is them however, with whom southern inhabitants come into contact and in this case were sometimes stunned by. The personnel of the restaurant for example, saw her prejudice about ‘northerners’ strengthened by it. There are also however young, poor Muslim girls that practice petty trade; walk around with biscuits or peanuts to sell on their head all day and have no choice than contribute likewise to their family-income. Other Muslim girls are in prostitution (*Cadev Conseil* / *ASTBEF*, 2006) or navigate to the Middle-East, appropriating the Hajj so to say. In Saudi Arabia they work in confined informal sectors, most likely in households or on the streets. The situation of girls originating from northern parts of town or country is by no means singular. Most of them live modest lives, while the type of partying youth described above, those are also found among people of the southern population.

The girls from the south whom this research is about however practice border-crossings daily as they move from southern quarters in town to those where northern peoples live predominantly. In this process geographical borders coincide with socio-religious borders. They prefer to do this in small groups, as the next chapter will show. Daily they cross urban borders and enter households that their parents or elders are much less likely to ever navigate to. This idea is not new when it comes to the analysis of those active in domestic work. (*cf. Dickey, 2000: 470*) As such much of this youth are more mobile and crossing more borders than their parents would. During my stay in Chad

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66 Approximately 150 euro’s.
there were adults that bluntly stated: *I never come there:* about the part of town they did not relate to in terms of religion, lifestyle or sympathy.

As much as the northern girls that come to party in *Moursal* adapt to that environment - the place where they are free to dress according to the newest fashion and come more close to boys and occasionally drink - the girls from southern N’Djamena adapt to the extreme contra-environment almost daily. The most visible outcome of this is wearing veils. Obviously they are in a more marginal position than the first group of girls: they navigate through public and religious spheres and their presence is only tolerated with covered head and hair, while the first girls are in a closed setting and adapt to a different moral economy as the occasion allows for it and is voluntary and wished for. Perhaps constrained as their regular life may be, in these setting the northern girls are able to break out. Whereas the southern girls/bonnes do not have much choice than to wear a veil in their employers part of town and household. Nevertheless, the veiling of young southern girls is not to be seen as forced assimilation or as a public sign of conversion to Islam as will be explained extensively further on in this chapter.

Young girls and boys from the south thus practice active border crossings in N’Djamena as they have identified their sources of income in other parts of town and within other ethnic groups than they originate from. Their border-crossing is very visible in the streets and they have been labelled as *les fonctionnaires de rue de quarante*, the ‘civil servants’ of the street *rue de quarante*. This street is at the heart of the northern part of town, *klemat-diguel*. The naming derived from the large scale border crossing by both boys and girls from the south as a very visible movement in the urban landscape. Certain routes are especially associated with this movement like the *rue de quarante*. One of my informants told me this axis in town, this specific road was therefore also called the *axis of searchers*. While the axis of the real civil servants and for example school-going youth was elsewhere and led logically in the direction of the administrative centre of town. The centre of town for southern people in general was this administrative-commercial part of town while for a lot of this rural youth, the centre of town, the locus of their aspirations and economic possibilities was clearly within northern parts of town.

As will be explained in the following part of the chapter, along this axis, girls tended to return home in small groups or side to side with a boyfriend/ husband. At the *rue de quarante* it is especially remarkable that they walk fast over the mid-bank of the road. It seems that they choose to do so because there they are least bothered with the shop owners and their relatives hanging around on mats outside after afternoon prayer. In the mid-bank they become part of the rush-hour traffic and are not subjected to comments of the inhabitants of the quarter as they are so visibly different, so obviously not from there and so clearly the poor domestic workers in this northern economy.67

67 Quite often I have seen people with disability choose the mid-bank in this part of town as well. Moving on the mid-bank for them provided them visibility -with respect to the sometimes stuck traffic- which allowed them to beg for money. At the same time it did not make them subject to the shop-owners along this axis that might otherwise have disturbed them for their begging behaviour.
Although crossing borders with frequent pace then, it seems reasonable to describe the movement of especially the girls that move daily to work in northern household as remaining (mobile) in especially marginal spheres. In the peripheral quarters they remain in the margins as a consequence of their poor housing conditions and for example their young age. In the Muslim households their space is mainly the kitchen or other places of (dirty) domestic labour and sometimes solely the moral space of inferiority. Thus although these urban geographical and religious borders seem especially permeable to girls, they still move in and out of ‘meaningful places’\(^{68}\), places that are not without meaning, judgement and inequality. In both home-districts of town and that of their employer they are confronted with the symbolic meaning of spaces. Such symbolic meaning\(^{69}\) is enhanced by the daily behaviour of others, placing the *bonnes* in a certain space within the landscapes they act in or move through. Boys seem to be less affected by this ‘meaningful places’, due to the nature of their work which is often more apprenticeship-like and thus at least slightly better evaluated. But for the southern boys and young men working in domestics something else is also at stake. For them, as already being initiated it is almost impossible to carry out domestic work in a southern household. Initiated men would be insulted for doing women’s work. In northern parts of town however, they do not face such humiliation if they work in the domestic field\(^ {70} \). Thus as domestic workers men are more marginal in southern households than in northern ones. Some boys clearly stated that: “if they insult me (northerners) for doing domestic work, I do not bother”, but they would not be able to do such work in a household of southerners.

The spaces these girls and boys, young women and young men move through, and the way they actively cross social-cultural and therewith geographical boundaries is not necessarily empowering, as the spaces they move through remain to be seen as marginal ones. Nevertheless within the marginal spaces they create their own spaces for manoeuvre. The continuing part of the chapter will discuss aspects of border-crossing as closely related to the process of appropriation of the urban fabric. How do girls and young female migrants in town navigate through its spaces? Foremost by appropriating the help of each other, their peer-group sympathies and the landscapes of friendship and affection? The following chapter will develop this argument further. In the remaining part of the current chapter the more geographical, and physical aspects of appropriation will be discussed and their close relationship with economic niche-finding. Some young women were much less geographically mobile in this city than others however and this had implications for their opportunities, as will be described as well.

\(^{68}\) See Dickey 2000 and her use of Bourdieu (1977) in: *Permeable homes: domestic service, household spaces, and the vulnerability of class boundaries in Indi*.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) In the past, those southern men employed as domestic workers in French-colonial households were humiliated by other southerners by calling them the *marmitons* (*marmite* means pan), referring to the dirty pans they washed for work.
Appropriation of urban the urban fabric

Appropriation as an analytical concept has especially been linked to the African urban settings for reasons the following example shows: Le Canal Saint Martin, in Chad, once described to be the ideal place of urban gardening at the skirts of Fort Lamy (Vivien 2006) nowadays lies in the middle of town. Beyond the canal, to its east, a large amount of districts have arisen since colonial times. People refer to Canal Saint Martin as a canal, while it looks much more like a garbage-dump. Full of black plastic-bags, used fake hair and other household-dirt this “canal” divides the quarter of Ardep Djoumal with that of Moursal. Some gardening is done on its shores yet the salad and tomatoes grown here can not be healthy as the banks of this canal regularly function as a public toilet for people on their way to work and probably also at night. Only long after the rainy season suddenly there is water in this canal. Two boys have constructed and improvised a small bridge of mud-dirt mixture and wooden pieces at a few places letting the water (that stands still) through. To cross their bridge is to loose less time on the way to work or university or a visit...Yet the little boys demand money for every-one crossing the bridge, a 25 cfa a person[71]. The story goes that they will push of the bridge those who do not mean to pay. Though the bridge is not high and the water not much or even absent, dirt is everywhere around the bridge. People generally comment and insult the boys unwilling as they are to pay for their invention. But from the boy’s perspective it is a type of creative ‘smartness’ with minimal means one can find a lot in a city like N’Djamena.

This example shows that the urban setting offers much material for appropriation, gaining some money, establishing specific relationships (in this case between prospective bridge-crossers and young boys) and therewith creating new formats of interaction and use of the urban landscape. Choosing to speak about appropriation instead of the adaptation by newcomers and the poor in town, means choosing to emphasize their human agency in how they relate to given technologies, practices and landscapes. Not always however, is the idea of appropriation applicable to understand what happens in Chadian towns. Sometimes in contemporary Chadian society it is almost impossible to see people as agents in the way they deal with new developments. Though this people of course remain agents, in such cases it is not applicable to speak of appropriation, but of mere adaptation only as the following example from Mongo town in Central Chad aims to make clear.

The recent influx of army troupes in Mongo is likely to offer an obvious counter-discourse to any idea on room for appropriation. In and around Mongo for around two and a half years now there is a lot of military activity.[72] Encampments close to the town are populated by constantly changing amounts of soldiers. The presence of the soldiers has completely reshaped the landscape of the small town, as their Toyota’s -sometimes without any weapons but with a lot of men behind, sometimes loaded with munitions- circulate through town. Women do no longer go out after five alone, as rape and harassment frequently have taken place in town after dark since their arrival.

[71] Comparable with approximately 38 eurocents.
[72] Not new to Mongo: in the past rebel and army troupes have for long periods of time lived of the local population see de Bruijn en van Dijk (2007) and Both (2006).
Army men, some housed in households in the town itself, by two or three together, roam through town and streets during the day. They ally themselves to small-table cigarette and candy sellers and some shop owners. Able to explosively start insulting others, or start asking for papers out of nothing, their circulation around the market of Mongo is very imposing. Women courageously maintain their small businesses on spots where soldiers pass by intimidating often and they were not afraid to offer a white researcher a place next to them under their small straw-roof for shadow, something that would be able to expose them to unwanted inquiry.....A prostitute kept opening her house to Guedengao and me even though a soldier continuously insulted me in front of her gate where he hung out smoking cigarettes all the time. Perhaps my presence would get her into trouble I was afraid.....Although at first I thought perhaps these soldiers where able to at least contribute to the local economy at the market as I saw some, loading a Toyota full with carpets and mattresses, market women were soon to explain that they would not pay anything but just took what they wanted. They were not in any means a positive influx for prostitutes in Mongo some in the business convinced me, as the soldiers would be unable to pay, and sometimes used force. Women in this town adapted to the circumstances, continued their jobs but restricted their movement and had to be careful in their speech. At night they were no longer safe in the neighbourhoods of their own town. In this case it was the army that appropriated a small town, in a more violent way than appropriation is used often in studies of African towns and the room for the women of Mongo was foremost to adapt, and not to appropriate.

In N'Djamena there are spaces where there is room for appropriation for girls and young women. Appropriation is found in small negotiations within the urban landscape and has different shapes for different girls. Appropriation in this research could best be seen as small adaptations to urban possibilities in which the girl is the initiator of changes. Ways of dealing with the urban landscapes in which new meanings are created and owned by the girls that might not resemble the general explanation of this by outsiders. Sometimes appropriation comes forth out of creativity or at least the will to make things work, the will to obtain a type of freedom, to become cool (djó), other times it results following the examples of others without questioning, sometimes out of naivety or just giving it a try. It will become clear that there exists a close connection between appropriation and urban navigation.

**Veiling/appropriating appearance**

As mentioned before: border crossing in N'Djamena by young southern girls demanded veiling. Speaking about the covering of their hair some girls stated “*they oblige us to wear it*”. Other girls that work in households in southern parts of town equally might wear a veil however. As Remaji dressed up before she left the compound of her ‘southern’ employer, she as a last preparation threw a veil loosely over her head. Guendengao called her a queen, joking with her for the way she had washed
and dressed up before leaving work. Remaji did not have to cross any quarter of town where veiling would be obliged to get back home. Wearing a veil seemed to have become a kind of fashion among the girls, just like the boys from the same ‘home’-area sometimes wear embroidered djellabas from and to work in northern parts of town, and take this fashion back to the villages. While in a group-discussion with women in Mowkolo village\textsuperscript{73} (January in Tandjilé) on the exode rural of the young from their village, I as a joke asked a girl with a green, nicely decorated veil if she had been to N’Djamena because of her veil. She said no: ‘I have seen it with those that return form N’Djamena and I bought it on the market (in Ter village) yesterday’.\textsuperscript{74} A girl in Dono Manga was also remarkably fashionable as she seemed the only girl in the village wearing mesh\textsuperscript{75} and a beautiful veil over it. She had actually been going to N’Djamena for years (seasonally) to find some money for her school-books and uniform. In N’Djamena she had been accommodated with an uncle, but did not work beyond their household, a non-Muslim household.

Wearing a veil then is not just an adaptation or a mere submission to a political economy in which a lot of relative wealth is concentrated in the Muslim-middle and upper class. The public opinion in Chad is focused on the ‘they make them wear it’ aspect, in which they refers to the Muslim population of N’Djamena. Investigation shows that southern girls also would like to learn Arabic (or French) and that this is one of their aims sometimes when they leave their village. Those girls and young women who were working in prostitution did not, like the bonnes, daily cross the socio-geographic borders in N’Djamena. They seemed more located in specific -southern or mixed- parts of town. Yet these girls to, used speaking Arabic, bleaching their skin to look more like Arab women and dressing in djellabas or veils as an asset to attract potentially richer clients or (temporary) boyfriends. The girls and young women do not only adapt to Muslim cultural features but sometimes intentionally choose to do so for it is believed to help them gain more access to resources. As such the girls and young women appropriate urban opportunities, as they adapt in dress language and behaviour. Some of the specific ‘Arabic’ features such as veils, in this process become fashionable and commodity goods.

\textbf{Appropriating knowledge/learning a new language}

For the young domestics from southern Chad, learning Arabic is an asset on return in the village. Many have indicated that to speak Arabic in the village with others that have been to N’Djamena, sets apart those who have been and those who have not (yet) gone to the city. Not being able to speak this

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\textsuperscript{73} In the Tandjilé region, visited in January 2008.
\textsuperscript{74} Women in Bewala (Mandoul) did not have much comments on their girls wearing veils. Themselves they wear something (usually cloth) to cover their hair because they do not have the time to braid their hair. Covering the hair is associated with being mature and considered more hygienic when cooking. Before young girls did not wear anything yet, but ‘now young girls always want to be neat’ they say the young girls take the fashion with them from town. But for them, the older generation, their covering their hair is associated with the practical part of it as it has been for ages.
\textsuperscript{75} Synthetic hair extensions.
language is to be excluded of the popular in the village. Some adults in N'Djamena made the comparison between coming back from N'Djamena and being able to speak Arabic, and coming back from Sara- initiation (Yondo) were male initiates would learn a secret language. These boys would be able to speak this language amongst each other while it would exclude those who had not been initiated yet. Comparison between coming home from N'Djamena and coming-out of initiation and for girls to dress up in beautiful clothes and dance can also been made. (Leonard 2000a, 2000b, staff at the farm of the Cooperation Suisse in Derguigui). Thus while being forced to speak Arabic on the job, as your boss only addresses you in Arabic, this is only part of the story. Many say they learn the language (basics) quick and consider it useful. Girls that have missed out on education in their villages also see Arabic and sometimes French as an important to learn in N'Djamena:

Fragments of interviews with Gua 19 years old.

I ask her if learning Arabic was a motivation for her as well...to go to N'Djamena, besides the reasons she has already mentioned.

“ I am very angry with my God...I am very angry with my dad who hasn’t send me to school.... [back in the village] I noticed that other parents were angry with their children when they abandoned school but I never really understood this....Only when I came to N'Djamena I understood that school is like that! I understood what school was and I was shocked to have never been to school.” Gua indicates that she would love to learn French she would even force herself to learn it...but it is only likely that she will pick up Arabic in N'Djamena she says. Which is something she tries but was easier with her previous employer. Later she returns to this issue and once more expresses her frustration with not having been to school and not speaking any languages76.

“ In 2005 I was in the village and I had a cousin working for ESSO at Bebidja. I was often ill..... I...used to have a lot of stomach pain. I went to my brother and told him: ‘If you really are my brother you give me some money and take me to the hospital’. My brother and his wife took me to the hospital. Normally when a woman has stomach ache it is you and the doctor that should talk together. The doctor came from Bongor...he started speaking to me in Arab...then in French... I could not understand him. Than he just started examining me. Later, when my brother was there the doctor told me: ‘when you go home send your parents to prison immediately....you are like you are dead already!’ I came back from the doctor with a prescription and I was angry. I told my brother ‘take it!’... My brother took it and started laughing...I just wanted to know what was written so I told him ‘next time I don’t want you to laugh about me’. I am still angry about it now.”

“When I was still in the village and brothers of the village who had gone to school came back from N'Djamena they said: ' if you don't speak Arabic and French you can not go [to N'Djamena]. My first employer [in N'Djamena] only spoke French and after a while he asked me: 'Where do you come from?' [astonished about the fact that she didn't understand any French.]

I told him I was from Doba’77 ‘Then why do you not understand us?’ he asked. Then I told him that my father and mother died and that therefore I never went to school...and I asked him what do you want me to do?”78 (09-09-07 & 03-01-08)

76 In many aspects Gua was one of our most outspoken informants, also concerning her ideas about education but many other girls have indicated their present realization of how much opportunities they missed by dropping out of school early.
77 Doba is a regional town, but she is from a small village 30 km further.
78 In fact her parents were still alive, but she said this to hide her humiliation.
During time Gua became well aware of missing out on a lot by not having learned any other languages than that of her village.\(^79\) The confrontation with others and the opportunity to learn a new language in town made her eager to learn. But it remained difficult for her, as she was now working long days with a lady from the south, who’s language stems from the same family as hers. Another girl in Walia from Mowkolo village (Tandjilé) formulated her vision on learning Arabic as following:

\[\text{Me: Many girls have told me it was important for them to learn Arabic, did you mean to do so when you came to N’Djamena?}\]

\[\text{V: In life when you learn other languages, in the future that will help you…You can ask for water. And when you are insulted}^{80}\text{ it won’t go past you without notice. And the second advantage is: when you work with someone that is good, the man will give 500cfa to his wife for your transport, or, when the husband sees you walking along the road (towards home after work) he will give you money for a taxi.}\]

Speaking Arabic, as becomes clear, is not only an asset on return in the village; where you can impress other youngsters with your skills, it is definitely considered an asset in town. Not only because of the practical consequences like being able to speak with your employer, and to cope on the market, but also because it is associated with certain types of employment and certain working conditions: as the story of Beau (13) resembles that of many girls:

\[\text{Me: Beau, was it also important for you to learn Arabic?}\]

\[\text{B: For me it was the distance, I never received money to take the minibus. But the Muslim he gives. And if he is a good person, at the end of the month he gives you your money.}\]

Beau had previously been working with a southern family but was not paid for transport. Many girls claim that Muslim employers pay better and pay you for a minibus (100-200cfa) after a long day of work. Contrastingly the predominant discourse in media is that Muslims-employers of domestics exploit the girls like slaves and that they only face insults and abuse.

**Working North or South**

This contrast in discussion has a lot more to it. People in my presence often discussed openly who would be better of: the taken-in niece working in the household of an uncle whose own children would all go to school, thus holding a secondary position in the household, or the girls that work in the northern households, where some say there at least they get paid, while doing the same work. Some say they eat better there, and receive money for public transport when they work very far from home. The contra discourse is that of the extreme exploitation, accusations of theft and being insulted as ‘dirty’ and ‘slave’ in Northern households. These are the common generalizations and will be referred to in chapter 7. In a local journal from 1993 (*Notre Temps*) an article titled *<< L’enfant qui est chez moi>>* described a lot of girls working in households of southern uncles and aunts. Practically

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79 M. Dangar in her research on the *exode rural* of these girls came with the results that out of 407 girls interviewed, 101 had never been to primary school, 150 did not come beyond the first two classes (CP1 & CP2). (Dangar 2005)

80 Girls have often indicated being insulted by their employers, sometimes to the extend that they can not endure it anymore and sought a way out to find another employer.
every southern household had someone -a domestic help- like that the article states. The article describes how some young girls did not support working for kin any longer and preferred to move out; to move to friends and live in small rooms together. In the article the suggestion fell that such girls are prey to become active in prostitution. Prostitution was identified as the only way for girls to survive, beyond the household of kin. This article seems to have been written before the northern Muslim households became an identified niche in the urban economy for southern girls. Nowadays articles are published on the (extreme) exploitation of girls in northern households. As in any situation there are multiple realities. Quite a large part of girls I spoke to named the benefits of taxi-money, learning a new kitchen and a new language, as well as getting paid, or getting paid better, as a reason to work in these northern households. Boys from the south are in a likewise position to prefer working in Muslim households if they work as domestics (for many work in gardening, as ambulant vendors, bar attendants etc.) For, as mentioned above, for a boy from the villages in the south, once he has been initiated, it is very shameful to work in domestics, at least in the southern parts of the city.

Many youth in the south nowadays leave their villages knowing on beforehand to aller en Daum; go to the Muslims. When asking parents in the villages what their children in N’Djamena do for living the most often say “it has to be the work of boy” indicating they will most likely work in domestics, but parents often have no exact idea of what their children do. In general we can say that many southern youth aim to work in Muslim households, for different reasons; being less humiliated (as an initiated man looking for a monthly income through domestic work), at least being paid or learning something new. Learning the Arabic language is considered an asset in the city and on return to the village, but is also associated with a type of upward mobility in the present, or for future jobs for youth coming from the south.

In the last part of the chapter I will describe how the same aspects of the appropriation of language and looks for the sake of economic navigation in N’Djamena work for another group of young female migrants. The story also shows how some other economic possibilities the urban fabric has to offer are appropriated by young-migrant women. Contrary to the first mentioned group of girls these young women are active in the domain of exchange of sex for money, but their opportunities are not completely restricted only to this economical urban niche; they also explore and like to engage in petty trade or organize pari-ventes. The girls this story is about are connected

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81 This is also the case for some youth that leave their villages to work in the smaller cities in the South (Sarh and Moundou for example). They largely come to work in the Muslim quarters of town.
82 Girls are said to be paid less in Southern households. If they work in the household of kin, sometimes there is only remuneration in some goods (marriage trousseau) when they return to the village.
83 Pari-ventes are parties that take place in Chad (so far I have not found literature that these parties exist elsewhere under the same name). The party is announced by the organizer (usually a woman) handing out small paper-copied invitations and giving them to acquaintances and strangers with money, to invite them to the occasion. At the pari-vente the woman sells beer and soda’s a little above the regular price and that is how she gains profit from the party. At the party she is helped by girlfriends that all dress in the same cloth and serve the drinks. If a woman puts a real effort into the party she hires a band or a DJ. Organizing a pari-vente is a sign of prestige: as the party will only be successful when one knows a lot of people that will attend the party. At the same-time (young-) women organize this parties in time of economical hardship to attend a
to each other as they have lived together in the same room, and now live in the same building. One of them is a newcomer.

Navigating urban opportunities, young prostitutes in N’Djamena

In the streets of N’Djamena Sahara dust, black plastic bags and other city dirt dominate the scenery. Sometimes this coincides with imposing military parades when the president moves or when students protest. People in different varieties of clothes depending on the quarter of town colour the pavements and motorized vehicles crowd the streets, sometimes forming the subject of terrible accidents. Lucy could see the accidents happen in front of her table next to the asphalt while she posted along the road where she sold alcohol, eggs and soap around Christmas. Though she was benefiting of the time of the year, when people bought more alcoholic drinks than otherwise, she saw the effect of it right before her eyes. Every day Lucy left her room in Kabalaye to fetch her table from her sister’s room, quite close to the asphalt in Chagoua. Used to going out with men in Kabalaye to provide for her income, she had recently sold the furniture of her room that she had previously bought with money obtained through participating in a *tontine* (rotating savings group) with market women. With this money she was now able to buy the stock for her table in Chagoua. Yet she complained “around this time of year one should have stock” referring to Christmas-time. Indeed in the past few weeks women around the avenue Mobutu suddenly had a lot of bottles of liquor on their tables. Bottles that most likely had been smuggled from Kousseri, the boarder town in Cameroon. Lucy however had a normal amount of goods on her table.

One day Lucy left home with an empty liquor bottle, boiled eggs that were still warm and some fried crickets to her selling-place in Chagoua. When I asked her where she was heading with an empty bottle she laughed and said by now I was getting to curious. Others laughed with her and the suggestion fell that she would manage to sell the bottle with something else than the original liquor in it.

Recently Lucy took up the (financial) responsibility for her younger sister (18 years old) that had arrived in N’Djamena not so long ago. Her sister is the mother of a baby girl and she had just been left by her husband. This situation and her own medical complaints made Lucy decide to take up petty trading. She was sceptical about the fact that her younger sister was not looking for a job, and the fact that the girl did not want to do any work like for example serving in a bar. She claimed her little sister was still hoping for her husband to return, but in fact he was appointed in Abeche a few months ago and never sought contact again. A month earlier Lucy told about the returning complaints related to her stomach and womb. To pay for her operation she organized a *pari-vente*. The costs for the preparations of the party she gradually managed to get together. The *pari-vente* was

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specific economical need. It is not strange to receive ‘gifts’ from friends to organize the party well: such as collecting money among friends to copy the invitations or to pay for a band.
supposed to bring up money but when a power cut stopped the music unexpectedly early\textsuperscript{84} she made no revenue. Although her medical complaints and the care for her sister recently made her take-up petty trade. This had been possible only because she had 'saved' a lot of furniture. To obtain a small capital to start her trade with, she had sold this stuff.\textsuperscript{85} Lucy still tended to go out to bars on special days (holidays) or Sundays to earn some extra money and have fun with her friends.

Lucy, now 25, had been married when she was still living in Kelo. She had lost her first and only child and was silent about her husband. She came to N'Djamena 3 years ago with two other girls, friends from Kelo that had taken up the plan to leave their jobs: selling beer in a small town with which they earned 25 ct per calabash. The friends they met in Chagoua (girls from their own region) showed them how to go out with men. In the beginning this was scary, but within a month the three of them together had earned enough money to rent a room in the quarter of town they preferred, where according to them there were less colombiens (streetthugs). With that move they moved to the centre of nightlife and prostitution Kabalaye. Although they started out together in one room, all of them have their own room now in the same building. Neloum has left them, pressured by her father to take up schooling in Kelo. But Rosa has joined the group she had always been in contact with. In fact Rosa is a niece of Lucy. The home they have all their own room in now, is from a lady that speaks the same language; Kabalaye. It is a dark deep home with rooms that also house mothers with several children with or without a husband or boyfriend. Some in the building come from Congo among them young prostitutes and jobless young men. These young guys sit out of the building every morning with no sign of hope in their eyes. Lucy and her friends claimed to have gotten the rooms easily because they originate from the same region as the lady renting the building. They tell that she had made others leave, to get them a room.

Mardi has newly arrived at this spot in N'Djamena. She lives with Rosa, who had fled to N'Djamena from Lâ after at 14 she had been married out to Muslim man, “a businessman, an old man”. When he died within a few years, she had to stay inside for a 3 months, after Islamic tradition. After that a sacrifice would take place and then it would be decided which of her deceded husbands relatives would take her as his wife. Before this would happen she fled to N'Djamena with a girl from the National Chadian Ballet, that was visiting the town of Lâ.

Rosa recently sold all her earrings to go back home to Lâ for her baptism “next to my mother. …here (in N'Djamena) I have nobody”. At this occasion in Lâ her mother made large basins full of rice-drink, that was offered to guests (practically the whole church came dancing to accompany her home after her baptism). To pay her part in the costs her poor mother and sister had made for this, Rosa sold her mobile phone while she was in Lâ. After a week she was back in N'Djamena, without any

\textsuperscript{84} The powercut stopped the music at two in the afternoon and there was no working generator in the bar. Normally pari-ventes start around 10 in the morning and continue to 10 in the evening.

\textsuperscript{85} Many women in Chad indicated that they would be unable to save money...it would be finished very soon with all the demands of daily social live. It is very common to sell the things you have saved for in case of need. During this research girls were encountered that sold furniture, nice clothes, earrings or telephones to be able to travel, pay for their own baptism or to start of a small trade.
money, still without make-up and without the artificial hair, things she wore before, but not while she was in Laï. While still in Laï she indicated she was unable to sell alcohol (bili bili in her old place in Laï) to pay for her bus-ride back to N’Djamena after her baptism...because she now had “taken the road of the church.....” She does start going out with men again (as she did before) to provide for her living after being back for a while in N’Djamena. While still in Laï she convinced us she could not stay there for Christmas since the extended family would make claims on her all the time as if she would be prosperous because she came from N’Djamena. She also wanted to be back for Christmas to party with her friends and the prospects of going out with men around this period of celebration. Rosa had been going back and forth between Laï and N’Djamena since she first arrived. In the beginning, after her flight, her mother came looking for her, and insisted her to come back, until Rosa was able to convince her she could take care of herself. She did so by buying her mother beautiful kitchen stuff for the amount of 70 000 cfa which she managed to get together with the help of a boyfriend at the time. Ideally when she comes back from Laï she brings with her a large sack of rice (important staple crop in the area of Laï), to sell in N’Djamena and trade for a while. The last few times however she was unable to do this due to bad harvests in the region. N’Djamena has also changed according to her “before, there was money in N’Djamena....but nowadays......”. It seemed harder to earn some money. A regular client would not pay more than between 1.000 and 2.000 cfa. While if one was lucky they would find a rich men paying for example 10.000 an evening. Before she was used to pay 5.000 cfa for her room a month, now it is 12.000, “the presence of the Camerounese and Congolese have driven up the prices” she says.

At one of her last trips she brought with her, as introduced earlier; Mardi, a niece of Rosa’s, whose father had died a while ago. She had only one sister in Nigeria, who was about to deliver and Mardi’s mother went there to help her. Mardi’s above front teeth were pulled out and her scars showed that she was from a small village, not from small towns like the group she becomes part of in N’Djamena. Rosa commented on this “you will be held by two people while your teeth are pulled...without doing that you are not beautiful people in the village still believe.” Rosa’s own mother has had it done, but it was not done to Rosa. About the scars on Mardi’s face Rosa says....“it does not necessarily mean that one is initiated. Girls might do it themselves, or their mothers, as a sign of beauty”. When Rosa woke up in the mornings in her small dark room in Kabalaye Mardi had already left the room and would be sitting in a bar close by and watch television. The bar did not have a good reputation. Mardi seemed relatively isolated, as a newcomer and as being unable to speak any other languages than a dialect of Kabalaye. She was the youngest of the group and sometimes ordered around, to do the dishes while visiting the neighbour for example. Rosa was sometimes tough on her. Once she didn’t find Mardi at home after a night out, she stayed waiting in front of the porch till around four in the morning hoping Mardi would come home. “In N’Djamena, people are killed, no matter where...I stayed outside from

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86 Therewith she refers to those residing in the same building. The owner asks more money because they are strangers. In the end this is driving up their own prices as well if they wish to continue living there.
4 to 6 in the morning” indicating this was a very dangerous undertaking. Few days after that she was able to track the home of a Muslim guy some had seen Mardi with last in a bar. She finds her at his home and takes her out of his place. “It is her fault. She doesn’t know city-life”, Rosa was still mad about the situation. Mardi, when asked about what she thought about N’Djamena started smiling wide saying; “N’Djamena is good, I want to stay. It is a city, you can walk around, you are free. When you are ‘in the rural areas’ parents will chase you when you are only hanging around at home (and thus not working) asking ‘why do you sleep at home’?”

Rosa was tough on Mardi also when she spoke of her as ignorant and infantile. But she also trusted Mardi took look after her room when she was away for her baptism and looked after her, and provided her with food. In the 1½ month that she was in N’Djamena Mardi quickly learned some Arabic. While she was unable to speak anything else than Kabalaye on arrival, the nature of her navigation (in the quarter of Kabalaye) suggests that learning Arabic was the most beneficial to find wealthy men to go out with. (For some it is French, when they particularly hope to find a French soldier as boyfriend). An evening, a few weeks after we first met with Mardi, I saw her in a bar, one of the hotspots in Kabalaye coming in without the girls, only with a few men. She wore a black, long djellaba she had borrowed from Lucy and took the floor to dance. This bar had a bad reputation, for fighting and shootings.....The girls of this group mentioned regularly going out there. Some of the girls present this particular night were dressed in western-style, nylon-fabriced uncovering clothes. The others were wearing headscarves and veiling clothes of different categories. Mardi seemed quick to appropriate the new type of behaviour that would help her earn money and become less dependent on her niece. She was not fearful and learned quickly, but with these characteristics she was moving deeper into the landscapes of insecurity one could fear. Fortunately she had a concerned group and experienced nieces to fall back on.

When Lucy and her three friends first came to N’Djamena they knew what kind of work they came for. They were not gradually pulled into prostitution because their urban navigation did not work out. Their parents would have liked them to stay in the village but could not prevent them from going. Knowing this their parents had given them the advice, to find a church in N’Djamena, “if they ever get into problems that would help them, our parents had said”. So that is what they did when they arrived. When I then asked if and when they had felt the church had been able to help them they told that yes, there had been occasions in which there were prayers done for them.

Lucy and her three friends recently had been locked out of their house at their quarter at night at the heart of night-life. They decided to prepare to sleep outside, something very dangerous in this part of town. Soon the neighbour-lady saw this happen and urged them to spend the night at her place. This was the beginning of a very useful contact. The woman came from the same region. She was divorced and had sent her children back to her mother in the village. Because she herself could not find a job she started selling beer from her compound next to Kabalaye. This for many equals prostitution and it was true that the lady had special boyfriends for specific periods of time.
that regularly came to eat and visit. The boyfriends had something in common, they were wealthy Muslim men and it seemed some of them where wealthy traders from Nigeria.

Among prostitutes it was commonly stated that Muslim men were less demanding and would pay more than a ‘southern’ client. Lucy and her friends, like their neighbour bleached their skin and unlike the neighbour often wore a veil when going into town. The neighbour had just let her gums painted black. Something that is practiced by some Arab women. It makes the teeth look whiter and is seen as a sign of Arab-beauty. In many ways the girls were appropriating certain dress-styles to attract a specific type of clients or (short-term) boyfriends. On one day Lucy would go out in a black djellaba and the other day in a much sexier dress with bare shoulders. When I was in the company of Lucy and her friends and sometimes spoke few words Arabic with my assistant\footnote{Guedengao came from the South but like many Chadians spoke fluent Arabic. We sometimes spoke Arabic together for fun.}, they always laughed. They recognized being at the same phase of speaking Arabic and mastering the same expressions. As many girls in the research were learning Arabic for (some consciously to achieve a kind of upward mobility, some out of mere communication needs) the levels they obtained were not very high after a 1-to 3 year stay in town. Yet learning Arabic was to many very important.

The way these girls dressed and tried to learn a different language is closely related to the political-economic landscape they navigated through. Northern men often came down to southern N’Djamena to drink alcohol and visit prostitutes. The girls were really directed towards such men as clients. But they also inventively engaged in the rotation of goods and money through saving-groups, buying luxury-items with that money and selling those when they were in need of money. Within the group no-one would ever be without food, even if that person had no income. Though Lucy is not happy with the attitude of her 18 year old sister that does not want to work, she takes up the role to provide for her. In Chagoua, Lucy soon made friends around her table (other petty-traders) that she comfortably spent the whole day with and trusted her trade to, when she had to go to the market, Lucy was able to adapt and give meaning to her presences in different parts of town in which she had different roles.

The women from the Central African Republic relied on the same type of mechanisms described above although they kept feeling others remained to see them as strangers, even as they tried to master Arabic towards men in bars. Some of them had awful stories of refuge and flight and were in their expressions much more marked by their history. Though they tried to appropriate signs of girlhood, through make-up and behaviour, their experiences as refugees made them look older. Their daily experiences were harsh as they were very much inward directed: towards their small group of centre-africaines. They hardly crossed socio-geographic boundaries as they were very much located in Kabalaye, where they considered themselves to be among friends, mostly other centre-africaines. Some of them had tried to work as domestic but did not keep up, as the remuneration was
to little to even pay the rent. In general it is hard to say they inventively sought pathways in the city, for they hardly did. Although they had preferred to come to N’Djamena instead of staying in Goré, the only thing some amongst them appropriated was alcohol, to be less ashamed to ask people for drinks and men for money.

Leisure
While for the girls active in prostitution leisure and work where interwoven in their daily patterns in Kabalaye, for the bonnes there was hardly any time for leisure in daily life. In the phase of discussing appropriation however there are two important observations that should be mentioned here. Around Christmas and New Year, hardly any bonnes nor their male counter-parts were seen on the streets of N’Djamena around rush-hour, the streets that were normally so full of them. It became clear that a lot of girls and boys did not turn up at work and had claimed at least a week off for themselves. In this period they were found parading in their own parts of town with glamorous hats, beautiful synthetic hair, some going out and drinking alcohol. Most of them visibly having fun. Their absence from their working obligations was a kind of protest from their side, a self-proclaimed space for freedom and leisure of which they had so little. In this period I encountered a few southern employers and a Muslim young man, who all had their domestic worker missing in their household after Christmas. They laughed about it and sort of thought it was funny that these youth were partying so heavy once a year. The Muslim friend said it was normal, that as an employer you had to allow that for someone that works for you 6 days a week all year.

During another week Guedengao and I were trying to count the amount of bonnes and boys on the streets and the small groups they formed, there was also hardly anyone present on the streets. Wondering what had happened and if the youth were all making over-hours, we did not understand why we counted so little southern boys and girls on their way home. Only the next day we found that they were kept up somewhere along the route where an event was taking place. Tigo (together with Celtel, one of the largest mobile telephone companies in Chad) was organizing a promotion tour with singers on a stage. When we saw the field, a lot of girls we knew were stranded there, one of the only bits of leisure available to them. They took their time to enjoy, while normally they were in such a rush to go home.

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88 Goré is a southern town close to which there are several camps for refugees from the Central African Republic. The women all associated the place with a prevalence of disease. Although going there would mean they would be acknowledged as refugees and would therefore have the right to humanitarian aid, which they did not have in N’Djamena, they did not think about going there.
Conclusion

The fonctionaires de rue de quarante know their own spatial orientation in town. Their centre of town in terms of work and possibilities lies in the north of N'Djamena, while the centre of town for others in this city is formed by its historically grown commercial and administrative centre. With this chapter I have tried to show that the girls (bonnes) occupy very visibly the urban surface at specific times of day. At those moments they appropriate mid-banks and cover their heads. Their pace is not that of leisure after a long day of work, but a fast one, preferably in groups. Especially girls identify the streets as unsafe after dark and definitely when one moves alone. The way they deal with the urban surrounding does not always allow them to be seen as agents in relation to demands on their appearance, but the girls have also identified particular Muslim and or Arab features as fashionable and they find status within them, especially on return to the village. Furthermore they relate knowledge of the Arabic language and wearing a veil with upwards mobility in the presence, or learning skills for the future. These are skills many have not had the change to learn at school, as a large percentage of girls has hardly had any schooling. What they bring back to the village then, is not only related to the status of modernity but also that of experience. The military presence in another town (Mongo) showed that the niches of manoeuvre there were really small, much more suppressed and no room for appropriation seemed left. In N'Djamena to some extend the girls remained ‘bridge-builders’ between specific parts of town and negotiated a room for manoeuvre. In the process it seemed they did not associate so much with a heavy politicized past and or present in which their parents see their crops destroyed by those they claim are supported by those in pouvoir: the wealthy Muslim part of the population. Individual experiences however make girls refrain from jobs in Muslim households when they have experienced personal assaults, but likewise the might retreat from southern households if they are not treated well. In that sense the girls are also constantly on the move if they are not lucky with their employer and need to become skilled in negotiating new jobs, either through peers or through their own language and personal skills. Sometimes weak-ties account for this.

Young women in N'Djamena that work in prostitution have identified other niches than those in northern parts of town but they have incorporated Muslim-features in their urban navigation as well as they daily encounter a diversity of people (clients) in Kabalaye. Their manners of appropriation are, like those of the bonnes, aimed at earning within short periods of time. Lucy, like the other girls in the research, but in her own specific way navigates through the urban landscape of N'Djamena. A landscape that is relatively poor and insecure. Not only because of recurring fighting in N'Djamena (coup) attempts, but insecurity is daily also shaped by a lot of bandits, a huge soldier-presence in the streets at night and for example a very impoverished social-economic situation where economic security only exists for a small part of the population. Yet in this particular environment the girls succeed in looking after for those in their small groups. This will be worked out further in the following chapter.
6. Landscapes of affection and solidarity

Peer-groups and human anchorage in the city

Introduction

On one of the last Sundays in N’Djamen Ga Guendengao and I arrived with the help of G., at the home of a group of girls. To some of them we had spoken in a different setting before, this particular Sunday we arrived at their place. On a corner of a block, build against a wall of a big compound, two three by two meter rooms were raised out of mud, their doors facing each other with three meter in-between space. A small pretty functionless wall closed only slightly their 'compound'.

In these two rooms 12 girls lived, paying a monthly 7.000 cfa per room. The doors did not close well from the inside, at night they were attached with strings from the handle of the door to something inside to keep them shut. I was somehow bothered by the walls I was leaning against with my back, in the middle of this small
compound, trying to stay in the little space of shade on a mat we had to bring ourselves. Then I realized the walls of these two rooms had been plastered, probably after the rainy season, with sand from the streets, explaining the black plastic pieces and other waste visible on the outside. We had a big group of girls gathered around us; the eleven girls that lived in these two rooms, G. who had introduced us there and an interested girl from the neighbourhood. One of the girls stayed on her mat inside one of the rooms. Her finger was infected and she had a lot of pain because of it. The other girls were dressed up in colourful t-shirts and second/third hand skirts and only after a while were all present on the mat. Their ages varied between 12 and 17. They were spending the Sunday together and did not go out often but tended to stay home in the evening, unless they went out with brothers from the same village. They managed to save some money together for the rent and also to afford the goods they wanted to buy to return with to the village. Just the other day they got into a quarrel with other girls, girls that were looking at them in their compound while walking by. When asking what those other girls wanted they insulted them and a small fight took place.

Their example is one of the much spoken about situations of how the girl-migrants live in N’Djamena: the very small rooms they share with many, not even having shade to themselves, the way their rooms are open to the street and can badly be closed, the proximity of the chef de race, the motherhood of one of them and the untreated infection of the other girl. The conditions of living are really bad yet the girls cope with it. They share a big solidarity to make the urban time work, as will become clear in this chapter. Though the proximity of those one feels at home with is unable to lift the burden of living conditions, they make the girls endure the urban time and this deserves to be analysed, without it an essential feature of navigating through town is being missed.

The above described girls come from the village of Beduigrui in the Southern part of Chad, department of Mandoul (before part of Moyen-Chari). There are a lot of boys from the same area in N’Djamena as well. Young people themselves as well as elders have estimated their number around 900/1000. Their regrouping in the city is often mentioned in the media (sharing houses, living with more than 10 in one room, boys and girls mixed, ‘that’s how they get pregnant or get AIDS’) and visible on the streets. Girls and boys that live on the outskirts of the city often walk to and from work in the centre and north of town in small groups. Sometimes within these groups girls carry each others babies to work and sometimes girls can be seen playfully walking hand in hand. Outsiders have comments on the way they dress and walk: they describe their style as villageois (rustic) in a city were a lot of people try to obtain middle-class standards.

89 An attempt to visit another group of girls at their homes was not realized. They proposed to meet somewhere else because they did not have any shade at home and no mat. To us this would not matter but for those girls it was unacceptable to receive visitors like that.

90 In Chad people refer to that as ‘léddar’ the remains of the black plastic bags that are found everywhere on the streets of N’Djamena. These plastic bags swirl around the city with the harmattan when Sahara sand and winds move them through the air. A girl in the research used this ‘léddar’ as a metaphor to describe men. ‘Men are like léddar, the wind will come and take them’. V. was married two years ago. She is around 15, working as a domestic and has a baby. Her ‘husband’ had already been taken by the wind to another girl. (Walia 2 december 2007)

91 See next chapter on the role of chefs.

92 The comment: elle pense que elle es arriver (she thinks that she is there/ she has achieved it), was often expressed by some young women in my direct environment in N’Djamena. It was used in reference to women riding around on new scooters with expensive handbags. In the comment one can detect a jealous tone, a tone that suggests other
Groups

Although the group-formation of these young people is often described (media and public discourse) as such: youngsters from the same area crowding in small rooms to share living costs and seeking the proximity of those they feel at home with (those from the same village), hardly has this phenomenon been studied as an important social dynamic, and even less as a dynamic of survival for this specific group. This chapter will however emphasize the essential importance of peer-group formation in town. The small-social fabric of close girl and young female migrants in N’Djamena reveal a reality of human anchorage (Rwebangira 1998) or a small affectional landscape that is very essential to understand their presence and their navigation in town. Rwebangira (1998) tends to call these relationships for survival: “the need to have access to significant others, e.g. people who one can trust and who can take notice. Even limited empathy and protection, and reliable exchange make sense compared to total neglect and indifference.” (ibid: 28)

This chapter is based on the idea that small social-affectional landscapes are essential to understand girl-migrant navigation and suggests that there might be gendered aspects to this. This micro landscape of small networks (within the larger landscape) is essential to study when we want to understand young girls’ dynamics of urban-coping and small scale resilience-networks. The emphasis on adolescent peer-groups however needs to coincide with the groups sometimes (structural) limitations in protecting from risk, as will become clear in this chapter as well. This part of the thesis will explore in-depth the close ties with same-age and same-sex migrants. One could argue, these form the core of an understanding of the here studied mobility of girls and young women. The chapter consecutively deals with the following issues to explain more on the importance and dynamics of these peer-groups; the formation of groups (historical and contemporary process), the characteristics of groups, the landscapes of comfort and solidarity, the safety but also the limited protection one can sometimes gain from being member of a small peer-group. Lastly the role of brothers and boyfriends in these landscapes of friendship, affection and protection will be enlightened on. Though the group-formation is not the same for the three groups and girls studied, group-formation to all of them is a relevant dynamic of survival and closeness or social security, examples from all groups will be given and will be explained.

A short history of group-formation

This chapter started with the example of girls from Beduigrui living together under impoverished circumstances. All of the girls present at the above described meeting stated it were they themselves who had wanted to take this step; to move from Bedigrui to N’Djamena and had saved for their journey through petty trade on the local markets in the South. Some had been making and selling bili young women would have liked to obtain the same. At the same time the statement also refers to the way people think that a woman who possessed such goods only could have achieved that by the help of a rich boyfriend.
bili, others a fried bean-snack. They used the money they gained through this trading (the work of mosso) to pay for transport up north. Some of them recently arrived and are likely to spend a year to an average maximum of three years (report Mrs. Dangar) in N'Djamena before they go back to their village. Others came a while ago, have saved what they came for and will leave within a few months; newcomers will fill their place in time. Though it was hard to establish a direct correlation between girls in town and the composition of initiation 'groups' there are certainly links to this as will be discussed further on. This would mean that their movement away from the village, in small -same age groups is something the community is already familiar with through the process of initiation practised for young girls and boys in the villages. This does not mean that migration in these small groups is the necessary consequent step. But the idea of being away temporary from the village, as age cohorts, as young adolescent's own wishes, is not completely new. (Leonard 2000a, 2000b)

In town, the moving into small peer-groups that are living independently is mentioned as something relatively new in 1993 and was related to two important associations. First is the association of this movement out of the households of classificatory parents in town where they were send to by parents and often consequently exploited as domestic workers. As such the movement was seen as empowering/ an act of agency at least. (Notre Temps 1993) Secondly this movement was associated with then needing to survive as young girls on their own, through prostitution. This was possibly written in a time just before the working in northern households by southern girls was identified as a mayor economic niche for these girls (see chapter four as well). The exact historical development is hard to trace but in many ways the group-formation seems to be a follow-up on fostercare constructions and afterwards started to enlarge through suivance (to be understood as chain-migration) from-out the villages. Also nowadays we encountered stories of girls that once started out as a domestic worker in a ‘parents’ household, but who had decided to move on to the place of friends to find a (better) paying job and type of independence they did not experience while put to work in the household of kin. Not all of the bonnes in this research lived in comparable groups, but around 50% did. Others lived in with parents or with only one niece or one friend. For the other groups things worked slightly differently and their group-dynamics will be discussed later on.

Thus while the need for a group in town to share the rent etc. is legitimate, once established as a ‘system’ it became something aimed for at departure, sort of a mechanism on its own. To leave to town to go on adventure is undeniably tied to those coming back to the village with consumer-goods and stories. Girls do not necessarily leave the village together (although the day after market day in Bekolo we were told that 9 girls had left together for N'Djamena) they were sure to refund each other in town.

During a meeting in a southern village of Bewala with girls and mothers a young girl told us that she had been to N'Djamena. When asking her if she found age mates....and I suggested those whom she was initiated with at the same time in town...she said they all were in N'Djamena. They did not all live together. I asked her if every single one of them went...but she indicated that only one
of the daughters of the chef we had just spoken with did not. Indeed the chef had asked Guendengao and me if we could not talk with his daughter that had been threatening to leave one of these days. When we meet the young girl, in a group of women she is laughing. I ask her probingly: "have you not been to N’Djamena, you wear this beautiful clothes?" She said to us she hadn’t been but would go soon and come back and shock us all. Choquer: that is how Guedengao translated it. She meant to impress us, the ones that would not go to town, to come back with beautiful clothes. The half-sister joins the meeting. She had been in N’Djamena and indicates she would not want to go there again. We ask her: did you not then, on the basis of your experience advise your sister not to go?

She tells: I told her but she does not bother. It appears this 16 year old girl has come back because she had been intimidated by boys several times:

The city doesn’t please me. I prefer to stay here and go to school, I don’t see the importance of staying there (in N’Djamena).

I ask her why not:

Over there are these men who want you and you don’t want them but they don’t leave you alone, they are even capable of killing you.

Over here if you don’t want it (to be with the boy) they leave you alone.

Were these men form the family of your employer or men from where you lived?

it were colombiens (streetthugs), and those from here (the village), not those of the employer.

It seems that this girl has had experiences in town to an extend we do not know. She came back to the village to stay and a older women preparing to leave our meeting commented the following:It is good she had come back when the men wanted her. She comments: that is the experience she has gained (from being in town). The experience of her half-sister do not make the girl that is preparing to leave, change plans. She is exited about leaving and sort of brags about the way she will look when she comes back. Something closely related to this new generation of girls. I have found to understand some of these girls wishes for beautiful clothes and being openly admired in something Leonard (2000a, 2000b) has described for the same region but related to the practice of female circumcision. Though at first I tried to explore if there was a one to one relationship between the group of promotionelles (girls with whom one has partaken in initiation-ritual together) and the groups formed in town, there seemed no direct correlation. Yes many girls said: all the others are in N’Djamena but they do not necessarily form the groups these girls live in. Speaking about (female) initiation however is a very sensitive issue, about which one is not allowed to speak. Presenting myself as a naive outsider in this, I was still unable to gain much insight it what the value of that peer-group-processes were to girls themselves and how they correspoended or contradicted the evaluation of group-importance in town. Nevertheless in terms of outcome: the coming-out of girls after initiation (which includes circumcision) and returning after a stay in N’Djamena seemed not so very different. Some have indicated that whenever someone comes home from N’Djamena this is usually celebrated because the person will bring (small) gifts, and the parents (although they might not have consented
with their leave) are said to be happy when they come back. Dressing up, getting attention and being able to distinguish oneself through clothing and ‘exotic’ language and behaviour seems to be of important interest of adolescent girls in the villages, something that both occasions -the return after initiation and return after a stay in N’Djamena- have in common. Also the being apart from parents and the family-household is an aspect of experience both the periods have in common. This is a comparison that only counts for some of the girls in this research however: for example young married women leaving Dono-Manga make the decision more related to being a youngest woman in polygamous household. (see chapter 4) Though finding a group in N’Djamena for them might be accommodating, it might not be as relevant to the individuals movement in these cases as it is in the case of the migrations from Bedigrui and surrounding villages.

Being in a liminal phase for a while might however still be an issue we can learn from initiation when it comes to the girls mobility. In the process of living in the city together: especially at the beginning, an experience of liminality might be central for a newcomer. It might reduce the expectations one has of the environment and the experience that one will gradually learn to deal with it and will have achieved something on return to the village. Inherent to the process of liminality is the social phenomenon of solidarity and equality: explaining some of the group-dynamics observed in N’Djamena.

Characteristics of small groups

Although there is thus no straight interconnection between the groups of young girls participating in initiation and those that find themselves together in town looking for domestic work, there is at least some overlap. In a group of five, four girls had undergone the initiation together, the other had undergone it a year before. The last one was not to be seen as a leader in the group however more than the others, as one might assume. Authority is perhaps lies more with those who have more experience than others, those that have been in the city longer than others although I never was able to find very solid base for this assumption. Yet the youngest perhaps often has a more specific position. How do groups get together? Although it is very common to find half-sisters in small groups or at least related girls, they do not necessarily arrive or leave together. A lot of girls had come alone:

Group Pëni: Victorie, Denise and Irene have the same father and different mothers. Victorie and Denise are both around 15/16 and have been in N’Djamena for two years now. They came together. Irene is 15 and came about a year ago. The mother of Mami (14) is a younger sister of the mother of Denise. Mami has been in N’Djamena for a year and three months now...she came with the famous mango-lorries. The father of Clarisse (13) is a cousin of the father of Irene. Clarisse came two months ago.

But the overall assumption is they easily find each other in town:
Victorie: already in the village we knew that the Sara can be found in Chagoua, so I went here and I found Sara. The first night we slept at the home of ‘sisters’ who had come way before us. It was also them who helped us (Denise and Victorie) find work. (02-12-07)

Beau in Walia Hadjerai: I came with a cousin from the same village. I did not know N’Djamena yet. I informed with people who spoke the same language as I did and I informed where people lived who spoke this language. My cousin went to Habena, I went to Walia. (02-12-07)

For those who moved in and out of the kind of groups they formed important safety nets as well as a places of ‘comfort’. Without their peers in town this type of migration would probably not have been undertaken. Literally, when asking girls if they would have come to N’Djamena if other girls from their village were not there, it was explained:

How would we come (rhetorical)? It is because we have friends here that we came. (Victorie)

They are sure that they find girlfriends over there. (staff of the Cooperation Suisse in Bedigrui)

They might travel alone, only to rewin ‘le group national’ over there. (mothers in Bewala, Bedigrui)

Regagner les camarades (to rewin their friend) is central to the movement to town for many. This in principle is not something new to rural urban or other types of migration. The issue of copying each others migration behaviour is not new and is discussed by Thorsen (2007) and Hahn (2007) and many others. How these peer-groups then work in the city is however still under-investigated.

The issue of helping each other find jobs is crucial to their maintenance in the city:

Part of an interview with one of the girls in the group I started this chapter with:

Me: What is your work? I ask S. of 14 years old.

S: ‘I work in housekeeping 15 000 cfa a month.’

Me: Are you being paid in time?

S: ‘That is always a problem. They ask you to wait. But we eat together. They are ok. This is my third job.’

Me: Can you tell me about your previous jobs?

S: ‘My first job didn’t please me (in Diguel) at my second job they accused me I had stolen something (at the rue de 50) I quit there.’

Me: How did this go?

S: ‘I went to my big sister. We went to the employer together. They dropped the accusations but did not pay for that month. It took me 10 days to find a new job. A friend helped me to look for it.’

Not only do peer-groups help you find jobs, it makes it easier to quit when you are not treated well, knowing that the others can help you find a job. Many of the girls we have spoken to knew how to define where their borders laid: at which situation they would quit a job: being insulted to the extend that they could not bare it any more, not being paid for a few months, not being paid for a taxi when the walking distance was to far, being accused of theft or to receiving bad(old) food. They were able to do so for they could rely on others, and their own growing experience to find a new job, here also ‘brothers’ came into the picture:

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93 Both Diguel and the rue the 50 indicate northern, Muslim quarters of town. These are the quarters of town in which a lot of youngsters, boys and girls, from the South of Chad find domestic work. (further explanation in first chapter).

94 Moch (1993) also recognized the need for peers to help poor women migrants in Paris to the first job, after that she noticed that they seemed to move to other jobs on their own, as they had become ‘familiar with the means to find work’. (1993:42)
Guedengao: You say that you quit a job when you are treated badly...but how about when they pay you 25,000 cfa but treat you bad?

A: "you have to quit, also when they give you dirty, old food, you can not stay."

Me: “is that the same for you young girls”?

V: “Its is the same thing, when you are treated good, you stay, if you are treated badly, you leave."

Me: “Is it not extremely difficult to be without a job? Would you than not prefer to keep a job, even if you are not treated well? “

V: “If you do not have a job, or when you are ill: perhaps your brothers will be able to help when you do not leave for work but stay at home. “

The role played by frères de village in the process of town-navigation will be elaborated on further in this chapter.

The groups spoken so far thus have specific characteristics. They consist of same-age girls and are not fixed in composition but fluid. One can come and go independently of others or with only one of the others and this is not destructive to a group. Some have stayed for two years and saved all they came for, almost ready to go back. Others just arrived and explain it is not yet the time to return The groups are often based on same village-background, and not seldom constructed around half-sisters. Yet girls often also travel alone and only reorient themselves towards each other in town. Speaking the same languages is one of the reasons girls group together also in the multi-lingual setting of N’Djamena. Living together, sharing rents, saving money together in tontines (saving groups) and helping each other find jobs or occasionally taking care of each others babies are characteristics of these groups of girls. In case of illness the others put in some money to help one buy medicine (although sometimes this is not sufficient). The rent is saved together and through the process of rotation of a tontine they all get bigger amounts of money at time, enabling them to buy their clothes and utensils to return with someday.

Concentrations of affection

The groups also offer something less measurable in terms of input and output, namely modes of affection and or friendship and loyalty or solidarity. One could consider being in the environments these girls move through it is psychologically important to have age mates around; for emotional and physical leaning so to say. During group-interviews some girls (tired but also seeking comfort) leaned against each other. I in town walked behind holding each other’s hands. The small habits of touch and closeness seem very natural in the group of these adolescents, something a living-in domestic girl would be normally deprived of. Also it happened more often that girls carried each others babies home or, in case of a group-meeting all in turns played and cuddled a baby to sleep. In particular such scenes are not at all strange to the human environment….especially also not that of the villages these girls come from, but to be able to have that in town the city is very relevant. Important for their well-being, a display of solidarity and closeness and foremost also of trust.
Their touching and teasing each other once during a group-meeting in Walia was commented on by a few adult women. As we had been speaking about the differences between their positions as older domestic workers and the young ones, the older women indicated that the biggest difference between them and the young girls was that the latter had much less worries. The young girls according to them work (where they also eat) and come home and sleep, whereas they themselves felt more troubled and worried in daily life, every aspect of the day had much more worries to it to them, they indicated. Following up on this remark two girls (who had been tickling each other and leaning against each other) where giggling. One of the older ladies than commented: “Look at them; they play like children”. Once more emphasizing the difference between their generations. With not to much observational data of the groups and without a background in psychology it seems difficult to explain its influence or importance exactly. Nevertheless there are a lot of indications that the closeness, trust and physical contact are of great importance to the well-being of adolescent girls in the urban setting. This characteristic of small groups should best be seen as a landscape within a larger landscape. A landscape through which the girls navigate and form a part of, and probably also are strengthened, confirmed and at least accepted by. For being in a group then, not only its obvious functional- but also its affection- and friendship-aspects are very important it helps to understand why girls can be laughing, make jokes and tease, in the sometimes so hateful landscape of uncertainty.

Limits to peer-group protection

While it should be carefully formulated to what extend exactly these peer-groups might serve as safety-nets, it seems they are generating a type of agency. Nevertheless there are situations and circumstances in which individuals and groups are unable to experience the protection of being (part of) of such a group. The group of girls this chapter started with had been robbed two times at night in their home:

Speaking about safety they told me:

*During the day it is ok. The night is the problem. People come like that. Two times we have been attacked. They carried a big knife. They have taken everything because we girls were afraid.* [18-11-07]

Later also the chef de race, a community leader that lives just around the corner confirmed the robbery:

*They have taken the clothes and cooking pots that they had already bought. I do not sleep well at night. When I hear something I go out with my torch. There is no light. The first time someone came and warn me. We went there but they had already taken their things.* [18-11-07]

The quarter of town, Chagoua, these girls live in is known for its thugs, generally referred to as *les colombiens*. Some girls had never had the experiences of being robbed even though their houses were situated comparably. Some young prostitutes we came in contact with had left this quarter of town because of it. The quarter they moved to, Kabalaye, the heart of prostitution does not have a more
modest reputation concerning banditry than Chagoua, yet they felt safer there. Kabalaye is more famous for the threats from military presence, off duty (we suppose) military men use their arms to take women from avenue Bokassa in their cars. Being forced to leave their houses is something the young women in Kabalaye also faced more often. They used to rent alone or with two, and risked being locked out of their houses when they were unable to pay the rent. Once three girls were locked out of their house in Kabalaye and busy tightening their mosquito net in front of their house around midnight. The neighbour lady saw it happen and urged them to come in and sleep at her place. Sleeping outside in this part of town would surely equal death, my informants seriously convinced me, making gestures on being robbed and strangled. The domestic working girls living in bigger groups were less likely to be unable to pay the rent, since they shared the sum with so many. Safety at night however is nowhere in N’Djamena. A lot of the girls working in domestics would deliberately not go out at night, or occasionally only with ‘brothers from the same village’. Some in this respect also clearly mentioned being free to go out, without adult supervision, was not a benefit they enjoyed of being in N’Djamena. Though adults in town and parents in the villages accuse their youngsters of living frivolous lives in N’Djamena, a recurring theme in speaking with the girls is that they experience N’Djamena as less free than the village, for example:

   Fifteen year old girl from Dono Manga in Walia:
   In the village we have a system; in case of full-moon we beat the drums and we go out to dance. Here we are afraid.
   With full moon we don’t go out.
   Why don’t you go out here?
   In the village you work on the fields, you yield some arachides and than in the evening you go dancing. But here: when you are so tired from work and you have to walk home, how will you dance? And we don’t have a space here.
   But why do you say you are afraid?
   We don’t have a space.
   But just out of the gate there is a big open space isn’t it? Can’t you dance there?
   But that is not our space, it is the property of the state, we are afraid to dance there. (14-10-07)

Girls often expressed that in the villages they were more free and that they would be able to also go out with boys in the village if they would want to.

   As such it is clear that being in a group does not unconditionally protect you from external threats and environments. But although being together in a small group, some of them faced threatening situations, being alone was much more associated with feeling unsafe. This became in particular clear in situations of walking long routes to home from work at dawn. None of the girls preferred to walk alone to their homes and if they did it was because they worked elsewhere than the group they lived with or because they had to work late. These girls would move faster along the roads in town and were less approachable also by us as researchers. While going home from work in a small group together meant laughter or carrying the baby of a friend, being able to reflect on things together, girls that walked alone looked more serious and insecure. This however did not mean that a girl walking alone would not be able to mobilize others to her aid if something happened, as sooner
or later she would encounter friends or *frères de village* by waiting a few minutes along the road. Specific routes in town especially were considered unsafe by a lot of girls, one was the bridge to *Walia* and others were roads in the most northern parts of town, or small streets in the peripheral quarters they lived in after dark. The risk they saw was mostly related to the presence of *columbiens* (streethugs) and soldiers roaming around. They claimed that they did not carry anything with them to protect themselves for knowing that a man would be stronger and could use it against them.

Being and moving in a group however, as was shown above, does not mean that safety is always guaranteed and freedom is experienced. To a certain extend the small groups are inwards directed for reasons of protection. Walking home together (it can be dark at 18:00) and not going out at night enhances safety. Using the contacts of a close friend to find work is the most likely scenario. Interestingly Simone (2006) paints a picture of highly active network-seeking youngsters in African cities to secure livelihoods and stresses creativity as the way of survival for young people in Africa. There might be a very specific gender-aspect to this. The girls in this research seemed much more likely to bet on their small group of same age acquaintances for their survival. In some cases ‘parents’ (a *chef the race* might be seen as one) or boys from the same same villages are mobilized to their aid or security.

*Frères de village*

It is a very reasonable question: where do the male counterparts of the girls figure in this? Do they not form part, for example, of the affectional landscape spoken about or are they part of the uncertainty landscape perhaps? Are the boys from the same villages the reason the girls to go to N’Djamena in the first place? Indeed some girls mentioned to have come behind a boyfriend or a husband, afraid that he would marry someone else in town otherwise. From a mixed group-discussion with adolescents form Dono Manga in N’Djamena the following anecdote is taken:

Me: someone told me that the girls are coming to N’Djamena because all the young men are here and not in the village

Dono (male, 24 from Dono Manga): *this is to some extend true, but that is not all: We (boys and girls) have grown up together, we have danced together, it is all the same generation. Now when someone leaves to N’Djamena, this is difficult, you remain missing that person. That is why they follow each other."

Gua (female, 19 years old)

"we reunite ourselves in town...we look for our brothers [from the same village] and our brothers look for their sisters. When you come here you already think you are mature...what else are you looking for?”.

It is true that, although surrounded by many different people, the adolescents remain very fixed on each other as coming from the same region, when it comes to friendship and relationships. Two girls clearly indicated that they went to N’Djamena behind a man, in both cases in the end these girls ended up with a baby and without a husband.
Having investigated adolescent peer-groups of girls and their important but also limited empowering ability for girls in the urban landscape, sometimes the proximity of frères de village was an important aspect to safety and comfort. One very clear example shows this. During one of the afternoons on our rock on avenue Mobutu, Guendengao and I had to solve a lot of miscommunication:

While we were waiting for the three girls we had met yesterday afternoon, we could never have expected this day to turn out like this. The day before we had a very interesting but short interview with three girls that came by late in the afternoon. They were open in their experiences and because it was getting dark and they where rocking on the stone benches to get moving, we asked them if we could meet them same time tomorrow. They were cool with this and we gave them each a 500 cfa for the taxi (that for them would require only 200 cfa) to get home. The following afternoon when the girls arrive....but wait around us for others impatiently.....it seems something is wrong. It feels as though the trust we built up yesterday is completely gone. Through Guendengao I ask them who they are waiting for but they remain vague. Another girl (one that was not there yesterday) has picked up a stick and looks really angry. She stands a little bit further on however most of the time. The girls start to talk with us when it appears those they have been waiting for have arrived. They are boys (around 18) of the same village. Guendengao gets into a huge debate with them in a language I don't understand however I soon heard that the word for money had fallen. Apparently the girls we had met yesterday had not use dthie money we gave them for a taxi but they had bought food with it. When they came home the other girls had asked how they had found money since it was not yet the end of the month. They had told they had received it for taking a taxi by a Chadian and a white lady that had been asking them questions for school. The other girls they lived with were not satisfied with the answer and it seemed out of jealousy had made the girls scared. They had told them that the money would kill them since they had accepted it from us who must have belonged to a sect\textsuperscript{95}. They told them that they never should have trusted us... The situation at our place at Avenue Mobutu is heated at first but soon the boys start laughing about it, thanks to Guendengao who makes an enormous effort to explain them. The boys, brought to us by the girls that were suspicious of us, spoke a little French and had clearly had more education than the girls. They soon start laughing and sympathetically said to us: “we understand...why are they complaining; if I would get taxi money for speaking 20 minutes I would never refuse!”. From a tensed situation we seem to have rolled in to laughter and jokes. The boys and Guendengao convinced the girls and we laughingly say goodbye. In the meanwhile I had managed to ask about the girl with the stick...I was told she was waiting for a girl she was in conflict with. Up to now I am not sure about this. Although we had said goodbye full of laughter our image as roadside-researchers was, we were afraid, severely damaged, as we had attracted so much attention in this setting of other young boy and girl-domestic workers walking home in the end of the afternoon. Many had come to listen for a while but did not get the whole story\textsuperscript{96}. (20-09-2008)

\textsuperscript{95} Accepting money from foreigners, especially Nigerians was associated with sects it appeared. Later we asked around and a lot of Chadian friends had stories about this. The most common story was that accepting the money meant you would soon die.

\textsuperscript{96} Although actually very disappointed by this experience, we continued posting there several afternoons to convince that when the same people came by, we were not chased by their sect- accusations but kept on doing what we were doing. About a month later something comforting happened. While we walked out of Moursal someone was waving to us and holding still
Though the situation at first seemed very destructive to our research, soon after I realized it had given very important insight. The way the girls had mobilized their brothers not only as to protect them, but to resolve the matter was very illustrative for the way they sometimes counted on their male counterparts coming from the same villages. When girls themselves felt they needed the interference of a brother, or in this case the criteria might also have been someone more schooled, they knew how to mobilize ‘brothers’. Brothers then have multiple positions to girls groups. For example they are almost required to go out with in the evening, for many girls will not want to go among girls only, for matters of safety. They have however equally proven ‘bad’, neglecting and fluttering boyfriends or husbands. They can harass young girls in town but equally can come to their aid when needed.

**Grouping in Kabalaye**

There are comparable features of grouping found in the group of girls and young women from the small villages of Kelo and Lai that lived in Kabalaye, the heart of prostitution, in N'Djamena. Three of them had come together and found a place to stay with friends. When they had earned enough money they moved out to hire the three of them together. During the research period one of them had returned to finish schooling and another one had come to join them (Rosa) and she recently took from the countryside her younger niece (Mardi) with her as well. The girls mostly go out to find men and therewith find a small income in town. They save money together in the same kind of tontines as the bonnes do. Although when they practice petty-trade they also cotisse in a tontine with market women. The primary fall-back for them was this small group of close friends and they preferred to go to bars together and not alone. The younger niece who came last and hangs out alone in bars is considered stupid (in the sense of ignorant) and vulnerable to the others. For the newcomer speaks none of the languages that she would need to manage. Her niece once lost her for a few days once as Mardi had been taken to a clients house and was kept there by the man. After finally finding her in this house she takes her niece with her and keeps a closer watch on her. Lucy had recently become responsible for her younger sister, who was not really part of this group....as explained in the previous chapter.

This small group also grows and shrinks in town and relatedness or friendship forms the core of the specific group formation. Speaking the same language therewith is another aspect. As well as identifying adults that come from the same region, as will become clear in the following chapter. There seems however in this group a larger disparity between the newcomers and the experienced that have been in town for a while and more hierarchy based thereon can be identified on the other side of the road. It was the girl who headed the interview and later the doubts on that very day at avenue Mobutu. We had not seen her since. This particular day she waited with her friend until we crossed the road to make a small chat. Finally we were convinced that the accusations she had against us were completely dissolved.

97 See the story on the girl that returned to Bewala earlier in this chapter.
within the small groups dynamics. One of the differences is this: while the *bonnes* only very gradually learn other languages in town, a newcomer does not distinguish herself much from the others. The behaviour she needs to find a job is soon learned and the girl is soon part of the group, participating in the same daily behaviour. The *fille-libres* in Kabalaye for their work depend more on loose ties than the *bonnes* and their work requires that they are outwards directed to establish new ties or find new boyfriends, as such from a newcomer more skills are required. It is in their benefit to behave city-like and to not be burdened by an image of being *villageois* (rustic) something the *bonnes* always remain associated with in the public opinion.

While the small group remains the core of identification, orientation, and trust and safety for the girls in Kabalaye, the nature of their work and slightly older age makes them more outwards directed than the small groups of southern girls. Their aim is to become part of the urban environment more that the *bonnes* who most often have return to the village in mind, they therefore integrate within and appropriate more their surrounding than the domestic working girls in this research in the process the group becomes an important come back, but they easily move and act beyond its borders.

**Centre-africaines in Kabalaye**

The *centre-africaines* (coming from the Central African Republic) that were interviewed do not live in small groups, although they often started out living together with others from CAR. They now loose of each other rent rooms in Kabalaye. In the early morning however they would have already found each other in their homes or in bars. They identify very clearly Kabalaye as their centre and hardly reach beyond this quarter unless for going to the market. They remain in everyday life closely connected to friends that also come from CAR. Although they have mentioned that there are more *centre-africaines* living in and around Dembe and Habena where the rents are much cheaper than in Kabalaye, they clearly prefer to stay in their small network in the latter quarter of N'Djamena. “There I have no work, here I will go to my sisters and find something to eat.” There is a clearly recognizable and important solidarity between the group from the Central African Republic. In case of illness of one of them, or the funeral of a parent in CAR, they all put in (small amounts of) money to relief the one in trouble. Partly their grouping is closely related to the fact that they are and remain different/strangers in Kabalaye and in N'Djamena. This is likewise experienced by the *bonnes* and partly explains their small-group and their being inward directed. The *centre-africaines* in Kabalaye compare themselves to the Congolese and Cameroonian women active in Kabalaye. Their identity is based on country of origin, rather than on villages or towns of origin. They feel marginalized in the urban setting as they are not recognized as refugees unless they move to the camps in Southern Chad (Goré) where CAR refugees are housed and receive assistance. They claim they have chosen not to go there as they identify the place with only illness. “People die a lot over there”. More than in any other groups
studied the coherence of the group of *centre-africaines* we worked with seemed to be tested due to conflict over boyfriends. They acknowledged that they were very inwards directed. The young women claimed that those they went out with as boyfriends ('dating' them for a longer period of time) were often soon taken over by one of the others when she saw this man had resources. It was able to cause quite some rivalry between the girls as well concerns about the spread of HIV within the group. These women like the others formed part of a small group that gave there presence in N’Djamena anchorage and a localized sense of belonging (Moyer 2006). Their group however more than the others encountered seemed the locus of more ambiguous feelings: solidarity and jealousy, having the same background of refuge but at the same time having very different social backgrounds. Yet foremost they needed the group to feel protected in a town in which they identified many uncertainty, especially from soldiers rounding up girls and mistreating there somewhere far out N’Djamena, and then leaving them there in the middle of nowhere. In an attempt to institutionalize their being a group even attempt were made to on a larger scale organize themselves by a self-proclaimed ‘leader’ as will be explained in chapter 7.

**Conclusion**

Until now I have been trying to elaborate on the workings of small peer-groups as very relevant but also relative to the dynamics of safety and survival in the city. The peer groups form small landscape of affection, solidarity, but sometimes also internal conflict in the larger insecure landscape of N’Djamena. It often forms the locus of belonging (Moyer 2006) and human anchorage (Rwebangira 1998). What is interesting is the combination of their ages, sexes and how this seems to be of importance. Though the value of having peers around in the process of migration has been studied (cf. Moch 1993, Schrover 2003) in the literature there were no references found to contexts as described in this chapter. The context of living so closely upon each other with their ages, as single girls all together. Although it did not form the focus of this study, it seemed this way of grouping together was a less obvious dynamic of boy migrants in town who seemed to live more often in pairs or alone. As such this seems a gender specific type of human anchorage for girl-migrants in N’Djamena. There is a large difference between those girls or young women coming to uncles in N’Djamena and living in with family (sometimes as orphans with hardly anything to return to one day) and the girls and young women whose urban navigation was made possible by the presence of close peers. A type of physical closeness and trust seems very important for individual well-being in town, something girls living in groups seem to find easily and naturally, while others may not. Thus while domestic workers of their age and sex are often seen as exploited and constrained in situations they are unable to oversee or cope with, these girls were sometimes active decision makers and the small networks of the girls they were able to fall back on made this possible.
“Parents” and their roles in the city towards young female migrants

Introduction
The previous chapter emphasized the presence of peers and the relationship between them in N'Djamena as highly essential for survival but foremost for the (emotional/ psychological) wellbeing in town of young female migrants. There were also at least two occasions where it was clear that the peer-group was unable to provide sufficient protection. In one case clearly frères de village came to their aid. In some of these cases adults came to the foreground: in the case of being robbed at night or having to sleep out in Kabalaye. The first situation was in Chagoua, where de girls from the opening of chapter 6 live very close to their chef as their two rooms are build against the wall of his compound. The girls lived with hardly any closure: the small wall and the doors that could only badly be locked did not provide them with much security. The chef has explained that since the girls have been robbed twice he does not sleep well. When he hears something he goes there with his torch. He worries for the columbiens in the neighbourhood and with this anecdote shows that even at night he is occupied with caring for his youth. They have taken the clothes and cooking pots that they had already bought. I do not sleep well at night. When I hear something I go out with my torch. There is no light. The first time someone came and warn me. We went there but they had already taken their things. (18-11-07)

The second situation was that of three young women in Kabalaye where Lucy and her two friends recently had been locked out of their house at night. Sleeping outside, something they where preparing themselves for, by tying up a mosquito-net in front of the house, one could be certain to be robbed, raped or killed in this part of town I was told by others when the anecdote came to the table. When the neighbour lady saw them preparing to sleep outside she urged them to spend the night at
her place. This was the beginning of a very useful contact; thereafter there were quite regular visits from the girls to the lady. Sometimes they ate there, did small chores and found laughter and advice. While through the emphasis so far it might seem that these ‘female youth’ lived in the absence of their biological parents (who were not in town) there are adults classified as parents (uncles, aunts or chiefs) that play important roles in the urban-time of these girls and young women. This chapter emphasizes which adults they are connected to and which roles are reserved for them. Of course much depends on the individual characteristic of a parent or a chief in how he relates to girl-migrants. Some adults held identified positions as urban community-leaders and were therefore to some extent naturally related to the concerns of the research group. Some adults have taken in a child of a brother or sister. Some adults enter the life of the girls or young women out of coincidence, others deliberately take up a type of leadership or concern for them. Several types of adult-girl relationships will be addressed in this chapter. To a certain extend this is very interesting material because the child-/ adolescent is often portrayed as the victim of adult agency in the process of migration: as encountering adults as traffickers and exploiters foremost. This chapter leaves room for a more diversified perspective on adults in the process of the migration of girls.

Chronologically this chapter will deal with the way girls seek to be independent of adults in town but sometimes can not do without, how community-chiefs position themselves towards girl-migrants from their community and how historically their commitment has been to the fate of rural-urban migrants. Also it will be investigated on what other types of adult-girl relationships take shape in the urban setting.

Independence versus the need for parent in times of hardship

Florence was two years old when her father died. Her mother remarried and Florence stayed with her in a village close to Sarh. When she became older she got into problems with the husband of her mother, she explains this by telling us: “I was not of his blood”. Her stepfather thought she had to leave the house. Because she had a little trade, selling a fermented type of porridge made from millet, she was able to use the money she had earned to go to N’Djamena. Arriving at the age of approximately 13 years, she knew that she had parents in N’Djamena but wanted to manage herself. She found a place with comrades from her home-village, girls she had known from back there and found a job as a domestic worker with an Arab family. It was when she had fallen really sick, after three months in N’Djamena, that she rejoined herself with parents. Actually an uncle even came and took her to a village for treatment. After she got better she returned to an uncle in N’Djamena. She has not found a new job yet. Recently she has met someone and got married. Together with her husband she now lives in Atron (peripheral, new quarter of N’Djamena).

Two aspects of Florence’s story come back in many other stories: one is the wish of managing on her own at arrival in N’Djamena—and being able to do so by the presence of peers- and second is the unavoidable need to fall-back on parents in case of serious illness or hardship. Of course Florence’s move from the beginning was also closely related to her relationship with adults (her
mother and stepfather) but this chapter focuses on the encounter with ‘parents’ in the city. Nevertheless it seems likely that such an experience with a step-father, or having been in the household of a classificatory parent before in a situation one does not want to return to, is one of the reason why girls prefer to manage on their own in N’Djamena. This has been referred to in chapter four as a gradual development out of foster-care constructions...a seeking for independence, ownership of wages and this coincided with the wish for experience and learning. Managing alone came back explicitly in the stories of other girls: a group of four girls for example indicated for example that they had not sought any contact with uncles in N’Djamena, that they came together, just to earn some money, and that they did not want too much interference. They had managed to buy their utensils and were preparing to go back home within a month. (roadside interview 06-09-07, girls aged 15, 14, 11 and 10). But when illness strikes, and when it is something that the girls among themselves cannot solve by raising some money and buying pharmaceuticals on the market, the help of a chief or parent is sought. One of the chiefs from the region of Péné commented on this: “they only come to us when they are ill or when someone has died”. And the chief of Nderguigui also commented: “the one day I treat them and the other day they don’t even greet me on the street.” The last was a traditional healer and therefore encountered especially many illnesses. Twice, while Guéndgao and I were present in the compound of the chief of Nderguigui a very sick girl was carried in by two friends and put down on a mat for the chief to be treated. The first time the girl seemed to have very high fever from malaria. The chief told us that because the girls do not have any money he tries to treat them. Only when he is unable to treat them he refers them to the hospital. He has encountered a lot of problems in the research-group concerning reproductive health. In his compound he has buried as many as 56 infants. Born death (sometimes triggered by attempts to abortion) or died within their few years after birth he took the task on him to bury them in his compound. “Normally the corps of a small child needs to be buried on parental ground” he explained. Being the only close parent they were connected to in the N’Djamena and not having any family-ground to themselves, girls and women came to him when an infant had died. Not all of the deaths of these infants were within this research group it should be noted. The chief had been living here for decades and during time for example also (young) married couples without money to send a corps of a deceased infant back to the village have approached him for help.

Who are these chiefs?
The position of chefs de race (lit: chiefs of race) in N’Djamena has been a colonial invention to organize rural migrants in town. Officially brought into being as “chefs de groupe” in the colonial period, by the people they were soon called “chef de race”. (Vivien 2006: 87) They represented their ethnic communities in the city. A chef the race ideally was recognized by the ethnic community and recognized officially as intermediary by the administration, that sometimes appointed them
themselves (ibid.) Although being an institution created long before independence “chiefs of race” still function for many communities today in N’Djamena, though their roles may have changed and are differently filled in by the different personalities the chefs are. Their primary most recognized role is those of mediators of conflict between two ethnic communities. For example in case of conflict between communities, the chiefs might be called upon to resolve the conflict ‘traditionally’. Furthermore, in the case of murder, a settlement needs to be negotiated. Although the constitution does not support it, many conflicts are settled between community leaders as chiefs of northern communities use and impose the concept of dia or the price or compensation for a victim of crime. Originally the tradition of dia was used amongst the Zaghawa as well as other north-eastern Chadian communities as a type of compensation to resolve not only death, but other related conflicts. People in N’Djamena claim that there are fixed prices for a crime victim, differing per community. The death of a Zaghawa has a much higher price, people complain than the death of someone from other communities in N’Djamena, and they felt these people were getting away with it due to their political position.

In the case of the community chief of Nderguigui, closely followed in this research, he was called upon a lot of issues that had to do with the youth from his community that resided in N’Djamena. If a domestic worker from Nderguigui was detained at a police station, accused of theft for example, the chief was informed. He would pay the warranty to get the person free or continue to plea for the innocence of the person involved. He felt overloaded with such cases. Northern employers he told us, did often not want to pay the wages of girls, and to avoid to have to do so at the end of the month, they would accuse the girls of theft for example. Even worse situations occurred: “Those are there that spend the week at their employers place (he refers to northern employers), they sleep there. Parents don’t know what is happening there. Pregnancies often become. But the employer consequently will say: ‘You are dirty. Don’t say anything. How can you say it is my son who did that’?’. When they ask for their right they face torture. A lot is happening there. Especially with those that spend the night there. In 1998 I visited a situation like that, a girl that had been mistreated in a way she was almost dead.”

When I asked the chef if he kept the records of all these cases he told me “What for? Who will look into it?” and “We are afraid to speak up”. Once again he was referring to a political economy in his country that in his eyes clearly favours one part of the population and prevents the other parts of the population to find justice in such cases. The following story is exemplary:

“There was this boy preparing meat in a bar. He comes from my village. His mother is a sister of mine. A wealthy client visited the bar. At the moment he wanted to leave he found out his luxurious telephone was missing and he accused the boy. Now will such a boy ever be heard? It is him against the wealthy northern man. They brought him to the police station and his friends came immediately to warn me. The boy would not be released if he would not pay the 60.000 cfa the telephone had been worth. So I paid for him. There was no way to get him free otherwise.”

The chef of Nderguigui was deeply involved with his youth and on the occasion of for example condolences, when his brother in the village had died, around 300 youth from the village
would pass by within a few days to show their respect. He had seen the severe cases some of the youth faced and was sincerely worried that these youth actively looked for work in the northern parts of town. He also directly related the coming of the youth to N’Djamena to local insecurity and conflict with ‘northern herders’ in the village.

His strong discourse influenced the youth that sometimes gathered in the compound, but many of them continued to seek their ways into northern parts of town. As long as they themselves did not feel abused they most often continued working there. In case of abuse they would leave the employer and find a new one. People in my presence often discussed openly who would be better of: a southern, taken-in niece working in the household of a southern uncle who sends his own children all to school, except for this niece. The niece in this rather traditional foster-construction would then hold a marginal position in the household. The other role is for the girl that works in the northern households, where some say there at least they get paid and learn something new, while doing the same type of work. Some domestic workers say they get better food with northern employers, and receive money for public transport when they work very far from home. The contra discourse is that of the extreme exploitation, accusations of theft and being insulted as ‘dirty’ and ‘slave’ in Northern households. Both type of stories come back in my interviews: (1) girls that have consciously chosen to look for work in the northern parts of town, (sometimes this decision coincided with the movement from the home of an uncle, to living with same-age girls form the same village) where they said at least they would gain something, receive better food, learn a new kitchen (another type of food-preparation) and a new language. (2) Others have been working with Muslims soon after they arrived as migrants in town, but have been treated badly and now prefer to work with southerners. (3) Some have worked for ‘Muslims that treated them badly’ and now say to work ‘with Muslims that treat them well’. In general the movement from these girls to northern parts of town are unlikely to discontinue in the close presence as girls keep seeking these routes, as much as some of the chiefs are deeply concerned.

President in Kabalaye
Moira, a self-ascribed chef of her community of Centre-Africaines represented this community in front of the police as the traditional community chefs did. They have my number, just like they have the number of the president of those form the Congo and those of Cameroon in N’Djamena. Moira had fled from Bangui in 2003. She amongst other women resisted to go to southern Chad, were refugee camps were improvised for Central African Republic refugees. Rather actually she had fled through Cameroon and after that naturally entered Chad by N’Djamena. She knew N’Djamena for having had traded in-between Bangui and N’Djamena in the period before the fighting started in Bangui. People in N’Djamena were often cynical, because many of such women from the Central African Republic were

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98 When she refers to presidents she speaks about the leaders of organizations.
active in prostitution. They used to say these women only came to N’Djamena because of its French military base. A base like that had been present in Bangui but had been closed. Now, they said, these women came to find a French husband here. Moira, says however, that there are girls coming for that reason to N’Djamena but not them. “You know Sonia? She asked me…. In Bangui we lived in the same street. She was a decent woman active in trading children’s clothes, and she had a husband and two children.” Indeed we know Sonia, how had come to N’Djamena by Cameroon. During her flight from Bangui she had no idea where her children and husband were. She fled towards Cameroon while some of her family fled to Congo (DRC) she says, they were all dispersed. She explained that she fled with her sister who died after two days. After some time, tired of walking she started looking for transport. To pay for transport and food she started looking for men in the countryside who could pay her in exchange for sexual favours. She arrived in Kousseri (Cameroon, close to N’Djamena) where she encountered others from the Central African Republic. They said they would go to N’Djamena. Sonia did not know what N’Djamena was, but after being harassed by the police in Kousseri, that continuously bothered her for papers when she went out at night with men, she decided to go to N’Djamena. “At least here they do not ask a woman for her papers, just like in the Central African Republic” she stated. Besides that Sonia had been born in a village in the North of the Central African Republic, close to southern Chad. “Centre-africaines and Chadians are the same” she more often stated. She as well as Maria99 say that Chadian people at least share with strangers and they portray the people of Cameroon as egoistic: not sharing a bottle of beer but all sitting with their own bottle in front of them. Maria told that when she, after her flight finally arrived in N’Djamena, she knocked on someone’s door and the lady understood and offered her and her sister a place to sleep immediately. After that she heard that there were women from the Central African Republic residing in Kabalaye and that is why she came here. Moira was a little older than Maria and Sonia and when she saw how the Congolese women in N’Djamena were organized and helping each other, she had wanted to create the same. She had also seen that their being organized helped them to find access to NGO’s who trained women amongst these refugees as hairdressers and petty traders and gave them starting credits for small businesses. Moira’s plan was initially ambitious: she distributed around 400 invitations to Central Africans in N’Djamena and managed to gather at least 200 people at several reunions. For a while they were well organized but currently the organization now hardly exists.

The women and men had not been able, although regularly visiting the UNCHR office in N’Djamena, to obtain refugee status. Because there were camps in the south of Chad for refugees from the Central African Republic they were told to go there to apply for refugee status and then would be able to receive assistance there. This was different for the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo, as they had no border with Chad they could be recognized as refugees in N’Djamena and therefore received assistance while living in the capital. Although their organization

99 Maria (now 25) had come to N’Djamena with her sister. They had fled Bangui in 2003 and also started sleeping with men to find the means for transport when they wanted to go to Chad. Maria is the one who in Chapter 3 is described as the one that was sent back for treatment to the Central African Republic in December 2007.
in the present hardly existed anymore and even in the smaller groups of friends, jealousy seemed to strongly influence the contacts within the group, on formal issues, Moira remained their representative. This was when she arranged for the money for those that were ill in her group. She did this by visiting people from the Central African Republic she knew to ask for some money, or when she was called upon by the police: “When something is the matter they call me. Once I got called by the police when a Central-African girl was in their confinement. There was a girl that at 6 years old had left The Central African Republic with her father to move to Congo-Brazzaville. Her mother probably had died and her father remarried with a woman in Brazzaville. When her father died she went to Chad. At the airport they caught her and they called me very early morning to come to the police station, (they have my number there). The president from Congo-Brazzaville was already there, she told me the girl came from Congo-Brazzaville but that she seemed to originate from the Central African Republic. And it was true. She spoke Sango and answered me to be 16 years old. She told me she came because she had her parents here. The number she gave me, which she told me to be her mothers number, the number according to her that she always used to be in contact with her mother, was picked up by a man (when Moira tried to call) that claimed to have this number for years. I have done everything to find her parents; I have send telegrams to CAR and tried it through two radio stations. I was willing to take her in the house as soon as I got my new space (but Moira at the time was between moving to another place). For the time being I wanted to shelter her through the CAR embassy. I went with a friend to bring her there. At the moment we turned around to leave her the girl also turned. “Can you not give me domestic work?” she asked. I replied to her: tell me, did you really come to work or pour la vie? A few days later I found her behind a bottle of Chari in a bar. (interview with Moira: 19-11-07)

As this example shows, chiefs / adults do not only act on their feeling of responsibility and aim of achieving something for “their people”, amongst which the girls in this research, they also express often their moral ideas on girls and girlhood. They construct their positions and those of girls and therewith formulate their (moral) roles towards girls. Moira was especially concerned by the young age of the girl and her hidden motives to make a living in N’Djamena. But her concern remained a concern and she did not intervene. Many community leaders however aim to intervene nowadays, firstly because they feel this ‘exodus’ of girls should be stopped because it empties the villages, contributes to the spread of HIV and unwanted pregnancies and because of the exploitation of the girls they felt confronted with in some severe cases. Secondly however, they were pointed to such ideas as their moral duty by an upcoming NGO and media discourse that labelled all these forms of child and youth mobility as trafficking and exploitation.

How exactly the chefs constructed their positions towards the girls was closely related to their own perception of the ideal roles of girls, their personal access to resources and their

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100 The expression ‘pour la vie’ seems to indicate: for the (urban) life and seemed to be connected to prostitution in Moira’s understanding.
101 National beer
102 Moira with this ending suggests that the girl from the first instance came with the intention to work in prostitution.
perspective on the situation in the village they came from. The following paragraph on several community chiefs *vis a vis* girl migrants will elaborate on this.

**Community chiefs versus migrant girls**

Looking for comparative movements from girls of other regions, a diversity of community chiefs were consulted for this research. First we heard that before the southern girls this research was about, it were especially Bilala girls and their mothers that performed domestic work in N’Djamena. In a discussion with the chief of the Bilala and some wise men he had called upon to assist during the meeting, we were confirmed that for Bilala girls this was not general behaviour. They told us their religion (Islam) did not allow young girls to venture out alone to make a living. They said people often mistook Bilala people for Kouka and Mododgo people, for their languages were so closely related. If we really wanted to know about this migration of girls they said, we had to visit the Kouka people. Indeed in Mongo, a smaller town in Central Chad, we had already spoken to a Kouka-chief who had told us that girls from his region come down seasonally to Mongo to work, and that for the occasion he puts up tents on his land to be able to accommodate them. Girls from a certain age, that were themselves convinced that they had the age for it, could engage themselves with this movement Kouka women in Mongo told us. Indeed the Kouka chief in N’Djamena later told more or less the same story. Moussa Soumaine told us that the *exode rural* from his region started with the droughts of the early 1980’s. (1982-1983). Even before that there were men that came for seasonal work, they carried water or transported other goods with carts, but they were not working as domestics. But in the early 1980’s the young, starting from the ages of 15 were pushed to N’Djamena and domestic work was done by some. More recently, he explained, girls from Dono Manga had started to come *en masse* to N’Djamena, and this narrowed the chance for work of Kouka girls, that were mostly seasonal workers, while many girls from Dono Manga stayed one or two years successively. This is why Kouka girls were pushed more into commerce and some even into prostitution to make a living in N’Djamena. Then he said “we have done everything to prevent them from coming here. We have made some politics and many of them were convinced to go back and have started to cultivate tomatoes and carrots in the village now.” But he also told that the youth, from around the age of 14-15 years, are seriously concerned with gaining some money and that therefore they easily live with ten in one small room in N’Djamena, just to be able to earn something. Is it now much accepted I asked him, since the movement of these young, unmarried girls has been going on for a while? He says “We are obliged to accept it. We have tried to intervene. At the level of the bus station back home we had forbidden that a girl that did not have the appearance of a mature woman could get into a bus to N’Djamena. But illegally they went anyway. And death followed them. They went by feet, anything to get to N’Djamena, and their thirst killed them…..We have understood that we can not maintain them there, they already have the age and they want to
provide for their needs. The land is not fertile and they have every reason to go. Boys sometimes went to Sudan as well, but girls did not.”

It is true, he tells us, that Bilala girls do not come to N’Djamena like that, even though they live close to the kouka. Between the Mododgo and the Kouka, he says, there is no difference, but Bilala girls stay in their place. I ask him how we can explain this difference in mobility and he says: “there where they live, in the Fitri region, there is a great lake (lake Fitri) and they have water permanently. They are active in gardening. And they are also not cut of N’Djamena. Their sugar and tea is guaranteed, because there is transport to N’Djamena daily. Women there can daily sell their vegetables and earn something. But we...we are a bit cut off, that is why the girls feel they need to come here.” The chef of the Kouka is a concerned man that like the chef from Nderguigui represents his youth in front of the court of justice or the police. He also is sometimes confronted with the request for resources when one of this youth is severely ill, or when someone has died and a funeral needs to be arranged. On such an occasions he mobilizes some people from the larger Kouka community to contribute to the financial assistance. The Kouka community, as he has shown, has tried to interfere with the movement of girls but have seen unwanted results of this. In the South of Chad, similarly, some adults, authorities and NGO’s were thinking of prohibiting the young to leave from the villages en masse.

A local authority, a woman with the post of sous-prefet in Doba was promoting the prohibition of the movement of girls from Derguigui and nearby villages, the region she originated from herself. She had been promoting this amongst community meetings held in the south, initiated by NGO’s from N’Djamena. But in fact this woman was muted in her discourse by the girls themselves, because of family ties. As she tells “just two nights ago, 4 girls stood on my doorstep. They wanted to spend the night here. They were on their way to N’Djamena and had left with the minibus that passed their village on the market day. I do not support that they wish to go to N’Djamena. I would rather sent them back. But I could not refuse them. They are the children of my brother. The last time he had send his son to me. His son worked for me so I could send him back to the village with money to pay his school fee. But things did not work out well, the boy thought he did not earn enough and he created problems between me and my brother. That is why I could not say no when his daughters and their friends asked me for a place to sleep. I would rather have offered them a job in my household, so that they can earn some money and go back home with it. But they were to many.”

Instead of aiming at forbidding the movement, many chiefs also recognize the large amount of youth in the southern villages and their inability to all find work there, due to the exhausted fertility of the land, and the conflicts with cattle-herders. Despite this vision they were often seeking for strategies to maintain especially the girls in the villages. A community of representatives of Péni tried to develop plans for the region. The rural areas of Chad have hardly been invested in since the nineteen seventies. But besides an improvement of farming systems they sought to develop

103 The journey from Derguigui to N’Djamena is a long journey and one is unlikely to be able to make the journey in one day. Many girls spend a night in Doba or Bongor on a bus station, where girls usually ally themselves to older women or friends to not feel afraid for robbery or assault during the night.
alternative programs in the region. They focused on all kinds of trainings to help the young gain skills in the village and to allow them to be able to contribute to the development of the village. This group of representatives possessed the scientific agricultural expertise and commitment, but the financial means were not yet in place.

Although many community-leaders are deeply involved with the faith of their youth in N’Djamena, especially in the extreme cases they are confronted with, their focus for this youth is on the village, and the ways to maintain them there. Little provision for the young or with the young is developed for them in N’Djamena. But the reciprocal relations between chef and youth might also be to ambivalent to achieve this. On the one hand the chiefs tried to protect girls, and they feel responsible for their youth in trouble, but at the same time they felt that especially the girls should not undertake this movement that exposed them in their eyes to all these risks of abuse and pregnancies. Yet the girls often sought independence from these chiefs. Although they needed them at times as well, the unequal power-relationship between the chefs and migrant girls might prevent real dialogue or the development of action in both their interests.

In the process of their roles towards each other, community chiefs and other adults, as well as the girls themselves, engaged deeply in constructions of what girlhood looks like and should be like. The most normative, sincerely concerned but perhaps not inclusive perspective came from a chef representing one of the communities of the Guèra in Central Chad. When we asked him if girls from his region came to N’Djamena as well, as the so well known girls form the south, he argued…

“Already during colonial times youngsters from our community came here to study. We had the first church in the Guèra and therefore the first primarily school. When parents wanted their children to study further after primary school, the children needed to go to Sarh or N’Djamena. When they came here the parents sought contact with their brothers and sisters in N’Djamena to receive them. Today it is still like that. I have 11 children but in my compound you will find 30 children. Recently parents from the village wrote me a letter. There was a girl of theirs in N’Djamena and a Zaghawa man tried to impose himself towards her…..but a Zaghawa will give her a few children and then leave her, while for us girls are considered as a very rich object (un object très chère pour nous). “ As a consequence of these concerns he had taken the girl in his house to prevent the man from finding her. But he was not at ease, knowing that the man would be able to insist, to loose his mind to this girl. Normally, he has argued, girls that come from his community come to proceed schooling, or to find a husband. Being from a Muslim tradition he then mediates for them, between kin and possible husbands. But girls that come to work like the domestics from the south, such a movement he did not recognize. This chef lived very close to the University and the Lycee so that helps the girls, to whose parents he had promised to look after them, to keep safe in town. “In my compound it is peaceful. I provide them with food. It is my obligation to look after them. But I will see into it that no men come here. They have their own room and own space, but the door can be closed and so they are not bothered by men but can study in peace.”
In general we can say community chiefs take up very protective roles and in the process construct their own images of girls and appropriate behaviour. Some chiefs encountered during this research were very traditional, authority-claiming and hard to approach. Others had modern jobs and modern education and for example actively were making plans with other well-placed people of their community to develop their villages...to some extend to therewith stop the exodus of their young people. Depending on the region one represented, and the personal background of the chiefs, different approaches to their ‘task’ as chefs de race became visible.

Conclusion
When it comes to the girl- domestic workers from their region, those chiefs that identify them are for the larger part very concerned. And some feel very heavy loaded by the topic, as the chief of Nderguigui expressed: “I have much to do with the court of justice. At the moment there is a boy in detention that is accused of stealing a bicycle. The sixth of December there will be a sentence. There are so many problems. I myself I suffer. There are no associations. They come to manage (se debrouiller) only. Nobody has thought of arranging things better. (18-11-07) The chef here refers to the absence of initiative to arrange things better for this group of young people. He himself is a man too deprived of political resources to really change things for the girls and is deeply affected by the history and contemporary political economy in N’Djamena. Although he pleas for the youth facing the court of justice he feels defeated and in a marginal position. Some more wealthy and highly educated chiefs had however a very different approach to the girls of their communities, yet most of their ideas and plans were still in developing stage.

These adults belonged to the landscape of N’Djamena. Some chefs claimed: “only when one of them dies, they will look for us, and we will meet them for the very first time”. Girls often entered the urban landscape with a reference to where the people of their community resided and where their chef lived. This 'mental map' was not used by many however, unless in times of hardship. Yet without the presence of the chiefs many would not have been helped with medical treatment or in other cases of emergency and thus they were at the same time of vital importance. The authority of such chiefs is at the one side very familiar for these girls, but on the other side not easing the contact. The relationship between girls and chefs due to these reason remains an ambiguous one.

Besides community-chefs there are more close leaders to girls as in the example of Moira, trying to establish leadership to organize those who had fled from the Central African Republic. Other girls came into contact with adults from the same region who had established organisations in N’Djamena to help them to a better position, examples of these were FAFED\textsuperscript{104} and ATPFED\textsuperscript{105}. Other girls immediately end up in the household of a parent and have a completely different

\textsuperscript{104} Fondation d’Amour pour la formation d’Enfants en Détresse
\textsuperscript{105} Association Tchadienne pour la Promotion des Femmes et des Enfants Déshérité.
perspective on town. Sometimes from out this position a type of upwards mobility is sought by
the girls through a move to start living with girls of the same age.

In general it seems legitimate to state that where possible, these girls tried to achieve or
to remain ‘independent’ from parents. Their perceptions of chefs of what a girl should do and
about where a girl is best protected might play a role in the reasons for seeking this
independence. Nevertheless with the hardship of the everyday experiences in Chad they might
come to face a point where this is independence is no longer possible. Chefs or other adults were
approached especially in times of struggle and hardship and therefore are having a hard time
with such a large population of youngsters in the city.

This chapter provides a discourse on adults other than the predominant when it comes
to the migration of girls however. In the general discourse, adults often do not act in the best
interest of the girls but appropriate their workforce in the household or mediate between girls
and employers. This chapter gave insight that asks for a reconsideration of the portrayal of
adults, in the process of migration by girls and consecutively ask for a different portrayal of their
part and position in the urban landscapes compared to how they often have been staged.
In the aftermath of February’s fighting in N’Djamena the house of the chief of Nderguigui was completely destroyed. With that the two rooms just outside his compound of the girls whose living conditions chapter 6 started with were also destroyed. The state of emergency that had been pronounced after the coup attempt on February 2, 2008 according to the state legitimatised the appropriation of territory for security reasons and state projects. A part of Sabangali’s houses were destroyed and all the trees on Avenue Charles the Gaulle were cut for security reasons. Part of Gardole, a central quarter of N’Djamena, was brought down, and several compounds in Chagoua were destroyed. Who knows what else was appropriated. A canal was being dug around N’Djamena to prevent rebels from accessing the capital all too easy in a next coup-attempt. The canal disabled daily routes of inhabitants of N’Djamena that used to be active in trading or gathering firewood within N’Djamena’s close surroundings. In this period of turmoil, through Guedengao I heard, many girls we had been working with sought to leave N’Djamena to go back to the villages they came from. It appeared that the ‘parents’ in the communities in N’Djamena had put money together to pay for their transport. In this period N’Djamena was challenged by one of its occasional ruptures. The girls that had been referring to Déby’s democracy took the road back home. Other girls just stayed in for a while, for them it was not the first time they experienced such a coup-attempt and they had no concrete prospect when ‘going home’.

The point of departure of this research was to understand the trajectories of girls and young women that came to N’Djamena as ‘migrants’ and how they interacted with the multiple landscapes of town. As Moyer warns correctly such pathways are often misread. (2006: 173) To understand this I have argued a focus on qualitative empirical data was very important. Not to disregard the importance of quantitative data in this field but to be able to go beyond the portrayal of girls as only victims or heroines of their time. The portrayal of victims is predominant for those urban migrant
girls ending up in domestic work. But therein there is sometimes a misuse of figures (Bouju 2005) or a disregard for important outcomes of the data (Nyanuti Ondimu 2007). I have not adopted the approach Bouju has chosen to explain what is happening in Chad only as social violence and the accumulation of it. Through such an approach the fine nuances of manoeuvre that make many girls pursue to continue in the urban context would have been missed.

Yet the time depth of the study was approximately 6 months, would I have been in N’Djamena on the 2nd of February and have experienced the aftermath of the battle I might have written and observed a different story. Thus misreading, or and incomplete reading of the city seems inevitable for a short-term researcher. It is exactly the volatility of this specific city that makes it so hard to grasp what happens and what is thought of underneath the public surface. It is not only the fighting on the street for a few days in the beginning of February 2008, nor all the people on the move to safer havens that I refer to when I speak of the landscape of uncertainty. Uncertainty is also about those that stay behind in such a period, those who can not flee and those that are sick and do not have access to medical assistance. Uncertainty is the epidemics that break out and the lack of food for the people. Uncertainty is also within the looting population and the seizure of property by the state. It is those happenings in such a short period after fight that remain to influence people’s daily life still half a year later.

Neither peer groups, nor the wearing of veils protect the particular girls in this research during this period. Nevertheless I have argued there are aspects of the urban navigation of urban migrant girls and young women that are often missed and deserve more attention. In this exploratory research answers to the following question have been sought:

*How do migrant-girls and young women inhabit and navigate the volatile, uncertain urban landscape of Chad’s capital N’Djamena?* The empirical data informed the structure of the chapters and themes explored. The navigation of girls and young women has been explored as a means to study them as actors in specific uncertain and volatile landscapes. The aim was to contribute to a broader understanding of the positions of girls and young women in Chad, a topic that has hardly been studied. The mobility of girls in Chad can not be studied loose of many other forms of mobility that are characteristic for Chad’s (contemporary) history.

Several themes have been identified as essential to the navigation of the research groups in town. Although there was diversity between and within the groups, it has proven very important to focus on group formation. The continuing flow to the city of girls and their ability to maintain themselves in this harsh landscape can not be understood without reference to the aspects of their creation of human anchorage in town. Mostly by allying themselves to peers from the same sex and same age, girls find structures of comfort, solidarity and a relative daily security. Sometimes the peer-group seemed unable to provide for this and access to frères de village or classificatory parents in town became very important.
Community chiefs have especially been found to occupy themselves with the fate of girls that come to the city. Some of them are heavily burdened by the medical and juridical issues these youth face, as they are quite often accused of theft and sometimes being abused. As harsh as the environment seems, many girls seek to be independent from such adults but become unable to do so, and call upon parents in time of hardship.

In the process of navigation certain parts of the urban landscapes become no-go areas for girls or young women: the household of an abusive employer, a quarter of exploitation or the whole city due to the men within that disturb you. In those cases one can opt out. This does not harm the close-landscape of peers as there is fluidity between groups. Having never tried the urban landscape can be a trigger to exclusion from peers in the village however.

In many ways I have tried to show that the girls are not only being shaped by the urban structures, but partly shape them themselves A focus on appropriation shows how those classified as domestic workers and prostitutes deal with an economically dominant class, religion and language, how they relate to aspects of ‘modernity’, but foremost how they seek to identify and make use of urban-niches.

The landscape of N’Djamena is a volatile and uncertain one in which only close-observation shows the room for manoeuvre for girls and young women. The urban landscape is ever evolving and also therefore the concept of navigation as a process in which actors deal with landscapes fits best to analyse what happens in the urban field. Some are obliged to navigate through this urban landscape as they have no home to fall back to, for others it is a landscape in which they stage periods of experience, whether as a very conscious choice, or in the process of following others. The diversity found between the lives of individuals should be accounted for as landscapes look different from different perspectives. The girls and young women do not at all live similar lives in N’Djamena, however they share comparable features and deal with parts of the same urban landscape.
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