

Analysis Of The Dynamics Of Cosmetic Treatments In Bamileke Women From Cameroon. From The Colonial Period To The Postcolonial Period

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ABSTRACT

In Bamileke country, the quality and color of the skin have great importance in the appreciation of the physical beauty of the woman. Physically, a beautiful woman must have a soft skin and in some villages she must have a clear complexion. The exploitation of oral, written and electronic sources reveals that women have been working since the colonial era to maintain their skin in various ways. These facial and body treatments have evolved gradually from the quest for clean and soft skin to the fascination with a "clear" skin. In most cases, this quest of beauty leads, sometimes, to the abusive use of industrially manufactured cosmetics to change the color of their bodies. However, the frantic search for clear complexion exposes the epidermis in the short term to various aggressions. This article aims to analyze the dynamics of the lightening of the skin of the Bamileke woman according to the stages of life in the twentieth century. It emerges that in "traditional" society, skincare requires the use of natural products from the immediate environment. *Padouk powder* was the most sought-after product and its use was particularly important at certain stages of life, especially among teenagers and women who gave birth. In the same way, its use extended to certain rituals like the sacrament of the twins, the enthronement of the chiefs and the rites of circumcision. From the 1960s, skin care uses other types of cosmetics from modern industries for the most part. The skin is now subjected to a treatment whose ultimate goal is "bleaching". The cultural mixing, the modernism and the opening to the outside via the mass media are at the base of this dynamic that this paper attempts to present.

Keywords: Bamileke, bleaching, lightening, women, padouk powder, reclusion, ritual

Résumé

En pays bamiléké, la qualité et la couleur de la peau revêtent une grande importance dans l'appréciation de la beauté physique de la femme. Physiquement, une belle femme doit avoir une peau douce et dans certains villages, elle doit avoir un teint clair. L'exploitation des sources orales, écrites et électroniques révèle que les femmes s'attèlent depuis l'époque coloniale à l'entretien de leur peau selon divers moyens. Ces soins du visage et du corps ont évolué progressivement, passant de la quête d'une peau propre et douce à la fascination pour une peau " claire ". Dans la plupart des cas, cette quête conduit à l'usage parfois abusif des produits cosmétiques de fabrication industrielle pour changer la couleur de leur corps. Pourtant, la recherche effrénée du teint clair expose à court terme l'épiderme à diverses agressions. Cet article se propose d'analyser la dynamique de l'éclaircissement de la peau de la femme bamiléké en fonction des étapes de la vie au XXe siècle. Il en ressort que dans la société "«traditionnelle»", les soins de la peau nécessitaient davantage l'usage des produits naturels issus du milieu environnemental immédiat. La poudre de padouk était le produit le plus sollicité et son usage intervenait particulièrement à certaines étapes de la vie notamment chez les adolescentes et les accouchées. De même, son usage s'étendait à certains rituels comme le sacrement des jumeaux, l'intronisation des chefs et les rites de circoncision. A partir des années 1960, l'entretien de la peau fait appel à d'autres types de produits cosmétiques issus des industries modernes pour la plupart. La peau est désormais soumise à un traitement dont le but ultime est le " blanchiment ". Le brassage culturel, le modernisme et l'ouverture à l'extérieur via les mass media sont à la base de cette dynamique que tente de présenter ce papier.

Mots clés: bamiléké, blanchiment, éclaircissement, femmes, poudre de padouk, réclusion, rituel.

Introduction

The phenomenon of lightening and whitening of the skin is old and continuous. It is known in many companies and aims to beautify not only the body, but has also become over time a source of foreign currency for those involved in the process of processing and selling products for this purpose. In Cameroon in general and in West Cameroon in particular, the practice is widespread and has consequences (Atoukam Tchefenjém, 2015: 159-175)¹. Initiated timidly during the colonial period, it has progressively evolved to the extent that we ask ourselves the question whether Africans especially

have not invented anything in this area. In other words, what were the skin lightening techniques in Africa in general? To this question, it is noted that the methods were numerous and varied according to people and their traditions. Among the Bamileke people, for example, many potions were solicited. Species such as *Pterocarpus osun* (Padouk / Camwood) were exploited and provided a red powder mainly used in tattooing. This technique of skin care, far from being solely for the beauty of the body was also intended for rituals strongly inked in the Bamileke tradition. It contained a variety of symbolic expressions that closely matched mystical, religious, and

¹One aspect of this work was published in April 2015. The reference is attached in the sources and bibliography section devoted to articles, and periodicals.

sexual motivations, reflecting various cultural aspects of African societies. Thus, contrary to the modesty ideas inculcated in the consciousness of Africans by monotheistic religions, nudity was a means of expression through tattoos and adornments. She had an aesthetic, functional and ritual purpose.

Much research has focused on the transformation of the body in the world in general. These studies fall into the field of anthropology of art, literature, poetry and eroticism essentially. Still, topics related to body maintenance are indeed a subject of history. The human body is a rich cultural medium for information about birth, marriage and death. It is loaded with messages that only insiders are able to decode. These are symbols that translate original messages whose learning is a wisdom that men should keep in their tradition. The latter has also been damaged by foreign cultures that have significantly influenced traditions. What did these different treatments consist of? On what occasions did they intervene? How and why did we do it? These are all questions we will try to answer throughout this analysis.

1. Skin Lightening Techniques In A "Traditional" Bamileke Environment In The 20th Century

In traditional Bamileke society, the treatment of the skin usually began very early and mainly at birth. It continued in other phases of life such as adolescence with preparation for marriage, home life and sometimes preparation for burial. He also accompanied the rites of passage from adolescence to adulthood, including the seclusion of girls, circumcision, marriage, the sacrament of mothers of twins and priestesses, the rituals of twins and the initiation of leaders. These phases of life were each marked by an appropriate body treatment, hence the interest of addressing the treatment of women's bodies at these different times in their lives.

I.1- Maintenance Of The Skin Of The Newborn

As soon as the little girl came to the world, a traditional birth attendant is in charge of administering all the care required for the newborn. She was an experienced woman who came to assist the new-born mother and her infant. Indeed, if the pregnant woman was not given any special care throughout her pregnancy, her deliverance was welcomed with joy. She was surrounded by women who followed one another at her bedside and assisted her in all her occupations.

With regard to the infant, the care consisted in doing his daily grooming through a natural technique intended to fortify it and to make it grow in strength and intelligence. Initially, the bathing of the Bamileke newborn was made with simple water, without the current soap that did not exist². Only a few substances obtained from complex specific plants gave the little body health, suppleness and beauty. At the end of her bath, the girl was dried in the open air and her skin maintained with appropriate cosmetics. If crude palm oil was formerly involved in the healing of the navel and the maintenance of the skin, it was gradually replaced by palm kernel oil with recognized therapeutic properties. If all of this care was simply for the hygiene and softening of the newborn's skin, other types of care were required of the adolescent.

I.2-The Skin Lightening Of Pubescent Girls

Natural products were used and packaged to heal and beautify the body. Regarding the lightening of the skin, *padouk powder* was particularly popular. *Padouk powder* was particularly prevalent during the confinement of girls in Bamileke country³. They carried it with them in their retirement hut and never separated from it. Conservation was done in a calabash. The young recluses, betrothed or not, used them daily to anoint their bodies after their toilet. *Padouk* was one of the essential beauty products of the young recluse. The prolonged use of this product allowed to obtain the expected results: softness, beauty, brightness of the skin before the marriage. In the opinion of the sources, the future husband could barely recognize his young bride at the end of his retirement. She was bright and seductive.

The day of the dowry is an opportunity for the young promoted to put especially his body in value⁴. She stands out of the audience by her makeup a little pronounced. It is the same on the occasion of her marriage during which she must be the most beautiful. She will have throughout the ceremony flash with her complexion. This is a premise for the wedding night that takes place as soon as the girl is detached from the group of girls of her age⁵. She must shine in front of her husband when they are in the nuptial box, set back from the main square where the festivities take place. For symbolic purposes, it is in this box that the girl's deflowering takes place if she were still a virgin.

The use of *padouk* also reminds the woman to maintain her beauty even after the wedding. This is how once wife, the young woman continues the maintenance of his skin, rubbing it daily with this product for aesthetic purposes. *Padouk powder* has a function similar to that of red ocher used in other parts of Africa. It is a substance that plays an important role in puberty rites. Its use is not merely symbolic. As Bruno Bettelheim demonstrates, red ocher represents in the minds of people who make use of it, the sexual organ of mythical women or their genital blood. In its extensive ceremonial use, red ocher should be considered as menstrual blood or something closely related to it (Bettelheim, 1972: 118). This analysis is consistent with the symbolism of *padouk powder* in Bamiléké hence the interest of specifying its main functions in the woman who has just given birth.

I.3- The Beauty Care Of The Child

The woman who has just given birth is caring for her skin in two ways. It does it from the inside as from the outside. With regard to the interior hygiene, it is obliged to consume hot served meals which contribute to the "cleaning" of its belly. Indeed, as everywhere else, Bamiléké think that the consumption of cold meals is not indicated to a woman who has just given birth. These meals would be less digestible and harmful to intestinal transit. On the other hand, drinks and hot meals allow the elimination of fats and blood clots contained in the uterus. The feeding of the woman who has just given birth is then special: corn couscous with *nkui gluantedu* sauce (bark of *Triumfetta pentandra*). This couscous specially cooked very liquid, is also consumed very hot. This special diet for the mothers is specific to all Africans according to food traditions. The regular consumption of hot

²Nguemngang Pauline, housewife, interview of 12/05/2016 in Bangou.

³Nganwaou Jacobine, housewife, interview of 14/05/2016 in Bangou.

⁴Mani Catherine, shopkeeper, interview of 06/09/2016 in Bandjoun.

⁵Christine Maptoum, peasant, interview of 02/04/2015 in Bandjoun.

couscous with nkui soupe gives weight to the mother who in a relatively short time, takes new forms. Thin women are showing good looks while beefies show more pronounced curves. This weight gain naturally has an influence on the woman's skin. She becomes firm and shiny. Her surroundings, find her sweet and beautiful. Indeed, the skin of the pregnant woman is prone to diseases of a physiological nature. Dr. Aguilar states on this subject the following element:

Some changes occur in the skin, especially in terms of its depigmentation during pregnancy. The vascularization of the skin and the secretion of the glands increase. The predisposition to rashes is accentuated. Those that exist tend to become worse and become resistant to treatment: acne, eczema, psoriasis and ringworm, which becomes particularly intense and persistent. (Aguilar, 1976 :192).

These skin modifications are repaired as soon as the Bamileke woman is delivered. The care is not limited to a proper diet, they extend to massages, purges and the continual use of cosmetics.

Like the infant, the woman receives care to restore her strength and shape. She bathes daily in hot water whatever the season, in the morning and evening. The body is then rubbed with palm oil to relax, soften the joints and ward off

insect bites such as mosquitoes. It is assisted by one or two midwives who help him recover his strength and recover his health and beauty. She undergoes a period of confinement during which one takes care of one's body and one's skin.

Body care is done through daily massages. The whole body is massaged, but with an emphasis on the belly and the lower abdomen. This massage aims to rid it of impurities or to evacuate the waste left in its uterus after childbirth. Formerly, a large fire was lit in the room of the new parturient, the strong heat released is likely to make it sweat profusely and clean moreover its skin. The mother and her child lay at the corner of the room on a bed of bamboo and banana leaves. This atmosphere, favored by the strong heat is also a way to keep the baby warm, for fear of a sudden change in temperature⁶. It was also a way to make up for the lack of clothes. This care was not limited to the only massage, the child was also embellished with *padouk powder*.

The new mothers used *padouk* for ritual and aesthetic purposes. On a ritual level, the practice was generalized to all women who had experienced the joy of having children. In her bed, the woman gave her guests a make-up, made up of *padouk powder*. She smeared her entire body and that of her baby with the example of the Ntomba woman from the People's Republic of Congo below.

Photo 1: Primiparous woman and her three-year-old daughter, during her confinement, at an exit party



Source: © Pagezy Hélène, 1989, "The feeding of the primiparous woman among the Ntomba of Zaire", Hladik Claude Marcel, Serge Bahuchet and Garine Igor de (eds), *Feeding in the equatorial forest. Food anthropology of the populations of the humid forest regions of Africa*, UNESCO / MAB, Paris, p. 88

In Photo 1, we see that the body of this woman is coated with red powder and her headdress made of small braids adorned with cowries shells. The copper bracelets she wears at the ankles and wrists as well as the advanced age of the child show that her own exit is imminent.

It was a ritual adornment on the occasion of birth, an important event that represents a break in the daily order (Falgayrettes-Leveau, 1994: 105). *Padouk powder* softens the skin and gives it a matte, unified complexion. It masks the impurities of the face and gives it a reflection of beauty and vitality. Its permanent use gave the skin a reddish appearance and softness. After bathing, the whole family smeared *padouk's* body. In Bafang, Baham, Bandjoun, Bayangam and Dschang, *padouk powder* was used with heated and bleached palm oil or with *lula*, the ointment obtained by dripping old

calabashes of oil at the time of combustion (Ongoum, 1979: 331).

Its use was based on the taste or fantasy of each woman. This oil could be put "in light touches in the form of bezants, ovaries, drops or tongues of fire on the forehead, cheeks, forearms and legs"⁷. *Padouk powder* is used not only in Bamileke, but also elsewhere, specifically in the pahouins.

With regard to the skin, it is advisable to speak also of the corporal paintings; the model is also widespread in Africa. Many peoples have the habit of joining the limbs if not the whole body of vegetable butter, palm oil, or red powder obtained from tree bark. At the Pahouins, women smear the body of *ba'a*, *padouk powder*, on the occasion of certain festivals or ceremonies. The people

⁶The baby should be kept warm as he was in his mother's womb. Change must take place only gradually.

⁷Ibid

of Central Africa use nkula powder, which is stored in decorated wooden boxes. (Ombolo *et al.*, 1982: 25).

Padouk powder gives the skin a matte, reddish color. Similar to the masks of makeup from European industries, it is used to embellish the face. His reflections on the body of the woman are of any attraction. However, their profusion was endless at ceremonies held in the chieftaincies, celebrations in which each woman managed to seduce and even capture the attention of the chief⁸. She was asked more for the traditional dances that gave rise to the gathering of a crowd of spectators. It was an unequalled foundation that was used in many ways: as a make-up by rubbing the powder on the whole body. As a make-up, she put light touches on certain parts of the face, usually on the corners of the eyes, along the chin and nose. It was also rubbed in the form of powder on the entire face and masked the shiny glow of the complexion as well as the tasks.

As a cream, *padouk powder* mixed with palm oil gave a ready-to-use paste. It was rubbed either in series of three dotted lines along the arms, or on the feet, or else on the whole body and had the advantage of adhering a long time on the skin. Very popular in the past, *padouk powder* is still known by the Bamileke people, but has lost its role as a beauty product. It is specially reserved for rituals and special cults.

Apart from the women who had recently given birth, the young recluses, the brides, the priestesses, the circumcised, the chiefs, the twins and their parents, every woman wishing to put on makeup with red powder did so after her grooming. It should be noted that apart from padouk, women used various natural products for the beauty and care of their skin. Originally, crude palm oil was used as a body cream after bathing. Palm kernel oil was then requested for its emollient properties. Gradually, the Bamileke adopted imported cosmetics.

Peasant women bathed more in the evening than in the morning. They left their house very early for field work and do not return home until nightfall. Indeed, a neat toilet was generally synonymous with exit. In other words, apart from rural work, women usually went out only to go to the market or for family or friendly visits. In most cases, baths were rare. They were made in the rivers after the field work⁹.

Padouk powder begins to lose its value with the appearance of clothing and manufactured products deemed more luxurious. At the time of the sexes, this powder had all its value. It highlighted the skin, the physical being left in plain sight and known to all. With clothes, it becomes difficult to appreciate the skin. The body is now covered and is valued only through clothing. The sources questioned also justify this abandonment by the fact that the padouk paste in its red color is messy and once adhered to the garment does not leave easily, hence the use of red clothes to escape this unfortunate coloring.

The advent of European make-up and cream immediately ready for use has also influenced the use of *padouk powder*, which women have gradually abandoned for their benefit. Less messy, they are varied textures and various fragrant fragrances. In addition, they are ephemeral and fleeting and come in various colors. Luxury powders and creams from the modern cosmetics industries have thus undermined one of the aspects of the Bamileke culture, which is now only a distant memory. Having become very rare, the precious red powder intervenes only in certain rituals that should be developed in the following lines.

1.4- *Padouk Powder In Rituals*

Apart from its ritual role during birth, the confinement of the girls and the marriage, the *padouk powder* also served as a ritual for the priestesses, the circumcised, the chiefs during their initiation to *laakam*¹⁰, the twins and their parents.

As soon as they are confirmed, the priestesses are now distinguished not only by their rattan or beaded ornaments, their bags of raffia, their headdresses in logs adorned with cowrie shells, but also by their makeup with *padouk powder*. They abundantly ooze the face, body and hair in a distinctive way.

In traditional Bamileke society, circumcised men stood out from uncircumcised boys by their anointing with padouk paste. Circumcision is a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood that unfolds, however, without initiation. In the same way as the girl who practiced reclusion at puberty, the boy was circumcised almost individually at puberty.

When they enter *laa'kam*¹¹, the chiefs are regularly anointed with *padouk powder*. At the end of their initiation, they must be beautiful, because a respectable leader and worthy of the name must also be physically attractive.

The mothers of the twins receive many attributes during their consecration. They use abundantly *padouk powder* during various ceremonies, including that relating to the release of twins¹².

In traditional Bamileke society, the ordinary woman was distinguished by her makeup. First with palm oil, this skin treatment is then done using palm kernel oil. The use of *padouk powder* occurs only after childbirth¹³. Where did the red powder come from in Bamileke country and how did it come about?

2. Presentation, Origin And Preparation Of The *Padouk Powder*

The *padouk powder* is extracted from a tree known as *Pterocarpus osun*. Its use goes back to the colonial period

2.1- *Pterocarpus Osun: Producing Tree Of Padouk*

From its scientific name, *Pterocarpus osun*, padouk is a tree of the family of *Meliaceae*, close to the family of *Sapindaceae*. Its main feature is to have a red colored wood. This wood is pink

⁸The leader being polygamous, has the opportunity to have as many wives as he wants. Because of his status, he receives women as prestige. As soon as her interest is in a village woman, generally chosen by her other wives, she has no right to refuse on pain of heavy punishment. However, most women accept this choice. Because it's a great honor to be among the chief's wives.

⁹This prevented them from washing once they returned to their home, where they were instead preparing for the evening meal that mobilized almost the entire family around the big home. This gathering was also an opportunity to rest and exchange some discussions until the end of the cooking meal.

¹⁰The Laakam is the place where the initiation of leaders takes place in Bamileke country. It is a preparation phase of the leader before his enthronement. This initiation lasts about 6 months. At the end of this retreat, the chief is officially consecrated.

¹¹Retreat during which leader is initiated to his new duties. He enters with his first wife and should leave after she is pregnant, proof of his manhood. Because a good leader must also prove through the number of women and especially his children his sexual virility.

¹²The "exit" of twins or twins' feast is an event that takes place in the majority of Bamileke chieftaincies. The celebration is not only an honor for the twins, but it is also a ritual to cleanse the twins' own family in order to keep away from all members any bad luck that may be caused by the birth of the twins.

¹³Noumbissie Catherine, shopkeeper, interview of 21/12/2016 in Dschang.

gray in the fresh state and becomes violin in the light then very dark red brown as it gets older. It grows mainly in tropical countries. Its maximum size is 30 m. Its trunk is slender and has high branches with leaves composed of pointed leaflets. Its yellowish white flowers are united in axillary cymes¹⁴. They open at the base and let out many winged seeds. His use for the production of statues is exceptional, because the tree is more sought after for its red powder (Nizésété, 1996: 81). It goes into the manufacture of furniture, often in simple veneer and sometimes in the production of dyes.

2.2- The Origin Of The Use Of Padouk Powder

The beginning of the use of *padouk powder* is controversial. In the opinion of some, its use dates back to the end of the nineteenth century, probably at the beginning of the German colonial period in Cameroon¹⁵. For others, padouk comes from Santchou or plain of Mbo, on the axis Dschang-Melong-Douala. The product was discovered by men hired for forced labor. While felling the trees in the area, they discovered a deep red tree. They took the bark of this tree, which they brought back and experimented on their skin. In this way the product became an oil and its use spread to other populations¹⁶. Still others attribute his discovery to the hunters, who would have seen the tree chasing a squirrel climbing on his trunk¹⁷. Struck by the particular color of the tree, they cut it down and spread its use. So many opinions on the origin of the padouk tree in Bamileke country. It must be recognized, however, that the south-west was an area that supplied *padouk powder*, which was one of the products of trade between western and northern Cameroon in the nineteenth century.

The Mamfé region exported rock salt, the hunters captured in the unpopulated areas the panthers whose skins enter the chieftain's trophy, the forest provides the *padouk powder* which is used as a red body plaster. (Barbier, 1981: 342).

2.3 - The Preparation Of Padouk Powder

Padouk powder, a red-colored body coating, is a cosmetic that was widely used in Bamileke countries. As the name suggests, it is a reddish powdered substance obtained from the bark of *Pterocarpus osun* commonly called padouk or camwood.

At the end of the collection, the bark, dried, crushed and treated, then enters the beauty care of the body. In fact, the fine red powder resulting from the packaging and treatment of the bark is ready for use. Some sources mention that the barks were crushed with water, so as to obtain a creamy paste¹⁸. This was then kept in a corner of the box so that it dries. Then the women reduced it to powder and simply applied it or mixed it with oil. Padouk women users report that the freshly obtained pulp after harvesting and bark treatment is better than the dried and preserved product. Compared to the latter, the fresh product retains most of its properties, namely its color, its brightness and its adhesion¹⁹. At the end of this preparation, one wonders about its use in general and the specific body care of women according to their age in particular.

¹⁴<http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/padouk>, consultation of 06/10/2017.

¹⁵Tonta Jacqueline, farmer, interview of 21/12/2016 in Bamena.

¹⁶Noumbissie Catherine, shopkeeper, interview of 21/12/2015 in Dschang.

¹⁷Tchamgeuh Laurent, trader, interview of 16/05/2016 in Mbouda.

¹⁸Njoughou Rebecca, pottery, interview of 12/05/2016 in Bangou.

¹⁹Guiewa Marie Madeleine, farmer, interview of 24/08/2016 in Dschang.

²⁰Tchankou Victorine, pottery, interview of 09/09/2016 in Bafoussam

²¹Tiomo Antoinette, retired teacher, interview of 08/08/2015 in Dschang.

²²Chieukam Martine, housewife, interview of 09/10/2016 in Bafoussam.

3. The Evolution Of Body Care In Bamileke Women

In contact with foreign cultures, the Bamileke woman gradually opts for new methods to beautify her skin. Several other factors are behind this change. The departments reserved for cosmetics increase their display. In addition to imported cosmetics, manufacturing plants located mainly in Douala, the economic capital of Cameroon offer products accessible to all markets. Their fragrances as pleasant as each other attract a growing customer base. In addition to milk and cream once available, add foundations, lotions, luxury powders in various colors and perfumes with the sweetest scent.

3.1- Modern Cosmetic Products

Among the toiletries used by the Bamileke woman during the second half of the twentieth century, the most prominent are of Cameroonian, Nigerian and French origin. The Cameroonian brands offer petrolatum, glycerin, "Nice evening", "Iris", "Luxury", etc. Cosmetics imported from Nigeria are known under the names such as Tortturn, Sun shine skin, Milk body lotion, Pretty woman. The French labels have names such as Milk of "Vichy", "Bioderma", "Mixa", "Trois fleurs d'Orient", "Diadermine", "Nivea", etc. These luxury creams feature in the beauty products of young Bamileke women, mostly emancipated²⁰ and very familiar with new ranges. Quite expensive, their use gives satisfactory results. These beauty products, says one of our sources, were expensive but original. Between 1960-1975, they came from French factories without counterfeiting as we see it today²¹. Textures and sweet scents, they gave the skin clarity, freshness and beauty without however flaking. Some of these products such as "Trois fleurs d'Orient" and "Vichy Milk" have disappeared from the sale while the rest is still sold today in pharmacies even if it becomes difficult to give credit to the quality²².

From unanimous sources, products for skin care are from the 1980s for most lightening cosmetics. Bamileke women justify their penchant for these products because of the very cool climate of the western region which darkens the skin, requiring special care for its maintenance. They are thus led to use lightening products to enhance the beauty of the skin. The cosmetic products solicited clarify and soften the complexion. In most cases, their effect on the epidermis is real. They promote desquamation, thereby degrade the colored pigment that is supposed to protect the body from various aggressions.

Prostitutes especially hold the secret of the desquamation operation. This phenomenon begins in urban centers and only extends later in rural areas where women with little emancipation care only for the use of bleached palm oil, palm kernel oil and Vaseline.

The range of cosmetic accessories is gradually expanding. To highlight the eyelashes and raise the eyes, Bamileke women now use black pencils to emphasize the outline of their eyes,

as well as their eyelashes and eyebrows. The lips are underlined and colored red thanks to the use of lipstick. Purple nail polish allows the Bamileke woman to highlight her nails and grow them. The white and brown powder serves as a foundation that reduces the shiny effect of the face. Women choose them according to their taste. The white color makes

the skin of the face more expressive, while the brown makes it tend towards the mat.

Photo 2: Display of different beauty products (creams and milks) for sale in a Bafoussam market



Source: © snapshot Atoukam, Bafoussam, 1998

Photo 2 shows a point of sale of products for body care. Observe the diversity of beauty oils from modern industries.

New brands of soap appear. In addition to the red soap sold in detail, the brand CCC (Cameroonian Chemical Complex) made its appearance around 1970 in Douala (Dongmo, 1980: 231). It also produces palm kernel oil and cakes. In Bafoussam, a household soap production plant was established in 1973. This factory, founded by a wealthy Bamileke merchant from Douala, produced about 500 tons of household soap a year.

This innovation significantly improves female body hygiene. In households, women now use so-called household soap, which is very popular: it is economical, hygienic and does not damage the skin. These are the main reasons that favored its extension.

The increasingly numerous and diversified luxury soaps on the market bear names such as "Premier", "Top" and "Lux". Sold in cardboard packaging, they attract by the colors and their scent.

Photo 3: Point of sale of toilet soaps in Dschang



Source: © snapshot Atoukam, Bafoussam, 1998

The range of soaps shown in photo 3 illustrates the diversity of products observed today in the various cities of Cameroon. It's all about the choice and the financial means of the followers.

In addition, shampoos for washing hair are spreading. Wise women use it not only to cleanly wash their hair but also to perfume themselves. Shampoos with the taste of "lavender" and "lemon" are the most popular. After the hair baths, women beautify their heads with creams and ointments of various kinds.

3.2- The Range Of Makeup Products

Like clothing and footwear, cosmetics are multiplying and diversifying in the years following Cameroon's

independence²³. The modern make-up, appear in various forms and allow the enhancement of the eyes and the face. These blushes come in different forms: powder, pencil, paste, gel and tubes in various shades. They are invariably affixed by women on certain parts of the face either to raise them, or to mask some alterations caused by fatigue or age. The white and brown can be rubbed over the entire figure. The red underlines the eyelids while the other colors are invariably applied on the face. These powdery shades are applied either with fingers or with a small brush. In addition to the makeup powder, there are also in the bag of the Bamileke woman eyelashes crayons, lipsticks with fragrances and colors of a wide variety.

²³Happy Suzanne, dietician, interview of 11/05/2016 in Bangou.

The extravagant use of makeup can, however, be misunderstood. Without refusing the use of makeup, Bamileke women say that a woman who wears makeup conceals a line of ugliness, because his makeup must be discreet and not too bright. Only prostitutes allow exaggerated decorations to attract attention. Indeed, the basic education received does not allow the woman to make advances to men. All these considerations justify probably the rarity of the followers of a makeup excessively applied.

The perfume is also part of the cosmetics of the Bamileke woman. From 1960, the French brands are the most popular. Their use was limited to the more affluent because the women admit having received more as a gift from their fiancé or their friends with regard to the price. In the opinion of the sources, the most popular brands in the 1990s had names such as "Chloe", "Nuit de Folie", "Poison", "Pierre Cardin". These are recent fragrances from the "Chanel", "Yves Saint Laurent", "Pierre Cardin", etc., all brand perfumes that drives most of the adepts to debauchery to acquire. In the same vein, the purchase of milks and beauty cream leads some to the widespread phenomenon of depigmentation with formidable consequences (Atoukam Tchefenjem, 2015: 159-175).

Conclusion

Ultimately, it is remembered that the skin lightening is a reality in Africa in general and in Cameroon in particular. This method of skin treatment has its origins since the pre-colonial era and is strongly rooted in the Bamileke tradition. The practice of changing the color of the skin intervenes more at different stages of the life of the Bamileke people, especially during adolescence, adulthood during various rituals and death.

Tattooing has several functions in Bamileke. It plays an aesthetic role because it enhances the beauty of its followers. It plays a functional role as it is a sign of social distinction, thus distinguishing women according to their age and status in society. It is also a cultural marker, because it represents the identity of a people.

"Traditional" beauty treatments have evolved and give rise to various tips for the bleaching of the skin. We are witnessing the manufacture and importation of innumerable quantities of products of all kinds, destined for the most part for depigmentation. The trend is more and more towards the "stripping" of the skin.

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