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TOWARDS AN AFRICAN MODERNITY
Plastic pots and enamel ware in Kanuri-women's rooms (northern Nigeria)

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In many West African societies, it is women who represent 'modernity' in the private sphere. They do this by accumulating an immense amount of industrially manufactured products in their domestic sphere, mainly acquired as part of dowry. The first generation of these objects came from European, American or Asian centres of production. In Nigeria they began to be manufactured from the early 1950s out of plastic, tin, enamel and glass. The great attraction of these objects is that nowadays one hardly finds any household without these mass-produced articles whether regarded as prestige items or as objects of daily use.[1]

An initial assumption here might be that the integration of these objects into the Muslim cultures of northern Nigeria has led to cultural standardisation in a region where, prior to the introduction of industrially produced objects, locally produced goods reflected regional and ethnic differences in style. But a closer analysis of this cultural change reveals that these 'European objects' have not simply been adopted without modification. Instead, their form, function and meaning have undergone changes in order to be acceptable for new uses and different life-styles.

What modernisation looks like in Africa, and whether modernity has a specific meaning different from Europe, are themes of continuing discussion.[2] The 'indigenization of modernity' is sometimes even regarded as a key topic in contemporary anthropology (Hannerz 1996). At the same time, it has been argued that the term is not very useful as an analytical concept because of its vagueness once it has been detached from the framework in which it has emerged (Wendel 2001:270). Instead, 'modernity' is often discussed in opposition to 'tradition', whether as a force capable of destroying 'old ways of life' (Malinowski 1947), an option for alternative life-styles (Ferguson 1999) or, more generally, the new visions and requirements of a life which is connected with urban centres, Western (European and North-American) life-styles, new technologies and consumer goods. As such, modernity is rather a cultural phenomenon which, in African history, is associated with the colonial experience and which has developed its more distinct local feature(s) since the rapid growth of global interconnectedness, accompanied by dialectical processes involving the approval and disapproval of specific cultural forms – and norms.

Several scholars have shown that the only convincing approach to thought on

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1 On the use of modern objects in West-African households, see also Cooper (1997), David and Hennig (1972), Sargent and Friedel (1986).

2 See Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), Rowlands (1996), and Wendel (2001).

African modernity is to accept that there is not just one such modernity but many. These 'parallel', 'multiple' or 'alternative' modernities[3] are the result of specific historical conditions within which features of Western life have been appropriated by different African contexts. Understood as part of a continuous cultural exchange (cf. Amselle 2002), processes of appropriation are as old as human culture itself.

One very specific aspect of modernity in connection with the exchange of Western goods and ideas and with African consumers is rooted in the role of certain items as a metaphor for the 'new way of life'. Rowlands (1996) shows that post-colonial African society provided a space for a wider social mobility – both up and down – which led to the establishment of lifestyles and identities that could only be erected through the market and through consumer goods. Similarly, Geschiere and Roitman (1997:137–138) record, that, to many people in their area of research (Cameroon), the 'taste of everything that is imported rather than produced locally is proverbial'. Here imported goods have become crucial in the definition and expression of identity, representing a strong metaphor for the 'material civilisation of success' and 'the image of what desires to be' (Geschiere 1997:137–138).

The significance that Africans placed upon such goods was observed earlier by anthropologists such as Thurnwald (1935:94) and Banton (1961:122), who noted, with unconcealed astonishment, the positive evaluations of mass products on the part of their African informants.

It is not without significance that, all over Africa, it is very often the same category of objects that are used to symbolise the exotic European world, although in quite different contexts. Such 'representations of modernity' include objects connected with food and drinking habits, bodily care and sometimes photographs, as Wendel (2001:274) describes for the altars of Mami Wata. Similarly, Europe is represented on backdrops in photographic studios, with their colourful bourgeois living-rooms (Wendel 2001:281), and 'room-dividers' filled with all the objects of social climbers drawing the eye. These arrangements greatly resemble the objects exhibited in women's rooms in northern Nigeria. And it is not only the material aspect of the objects displayed, whether in painting or *in situ*, which shows similarities, but also the way modernity is consumed – not just ritualised, but also celebrated and idealised as prestige goods.

The processes of recontextualisation and of the invention of forms, functions, meanings and aesthetics, as well as the social and spatial context of these objects, will be the focus of the present article.[4] Hence, I shall concentrate mainly on the following levels:

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3 See Appadurai (Modernity at large: cultural dimensions of globalization. 1996), Hefner (Multiple modernities: Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism in a globalizing age. 1998) and Larkin (Indian films and Nigerian lovers: media and creation of parallel modernities. 1997), after Wendel (2001:270) and Deutsch, Probst, and Schmidt (2002).

4 The research was conducted under the auspices of a Joint Research Project 'West African Savannah'

- First, I shall present the topography of the women's room, the three central arrangements, i.e. shelving, bed and wall – or spaces where industrial goods are accumulated.
- Secondly, the decoration of the arranged room will be categorised within the wider framework of life-styles in northern Nigeria.
- Thirdly, a brief insight will be given into the history of European goods in Nigeria.
- Fourthly, the presentation of goods accumulated within the 'economy of love'[5] will show how the objects are incorporated into the women's world.

1. *Towards a topography of the women's room*

Presently, in both rural areas and urban settings, the spatial structure of the compound basically consists of a walled area with three individual structures: an entrance room, a room for the husband and – as is appropriate in a society where gender segregation finds spatial expression – one room for each of the wives, where the children also sleep. A very recent development is the tendency for the men's and if possible also the woman's rooms to be entered through another room furnished in the style of a Western 'living room'.

Within the traditionally structured women's room, three arrangements of 'things of the room' have a prominent place. The first of these is is an accumulation of containers arranged along one wall as the 'shelving of pots', the second a so-called 'umbrella' or 'canopy' bed, the third consisting of carpets, mats and other items with which to decorate the walls. Whereas the umbrella or canopy and the wall decorations are gifts from the bride's father (including contributions made to him by others), the bride's mother gives the pots, dishes and containers.

During the 1990s, these accumulated containers were mainly manufactured out of plastics, enamel, heat-resistant glass, that is, Pyrex (or Durax as it is called in Germany) and porcelain. One of the most impressive examples of the 'shelving of pots' I have seen was an arrangement of enamel dishes decorated with portraits of Nigerian politicians, a military head of state (Murtala Mohammed) and an elected president (Shagari). Gold plates, thermos flasks, cooking pots and the so-called 'silver-seti' were not just placed one on top of the other, leaning against the wall, but arranged in expen-

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between the Universities of Maiduguri and Frankfurt, Germany, financed by the German research council, the 'Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)'. Although I have been working in Borno since 1991, mainly in the Kanuri village of Musune (Platte 2000), the multiethnic Lake Chad region and the state capital of Maiduguri, the data presented here are based on eight months of research conducted over seven research trips to these regions undertaken since 1997. My thanks also go to Stephanie Maiwald and Bosoma Sheriff for profound comments and discussions, as well as to Gerd Spittler, for his remarks and proposals on the first draft of the paper.

5 'Economy of love' is a term used by the Swiss anthropologist Claudia Roth (1994) for complex exchanges of gifts, money and favours within marriage.

sive, ornamented plywood shelving. Perfume bottles, cosmetic tins and scented wood, symmetrically arranged, beautified the arrangement in the foreground.

A second installation of objects is the 'umbrella bed'. In women's rooms in northern Nigeria there are three variations of objects that Europeans will recognise as a 'bed'. One of these is the king-sized 'family bed' made of wood and covered with a foam mattress and blankets. Straw mats are also used, though they are kept in the corner during the daytime, only to be unfolded as and when needed as a place to relax or sleep. Apart from these mats, neither the family beds nor the umbrella beds are used for regular sleeping. The family bed is too soft and is not considered comfortable. It is only used during the rainy season, when insects damage the roofs and rainwater soaks the floor, making it uncomfortable to lie down. The umbrella bed is never used for sleeping. Due to its function, it should rather be categorised as a shelving where objects are stored or as a bank in which the most precious things are kept. It is made of a metal frame, comparable to beds used in hospitals, though the feet and heads are different. These parts, painted in number of pastel shades according to the fashion of the year, are constructed in such a way that all sorts of decorations, such as clocks and mirrors, can be fixed to them. The whole assemblage is covered with pieces of cloth that come down as a canopy embroidered with flowers and good wishes, all in matching colours, and complemented by a cloth which covers the lower part of the arrangement. The legs of the 'bed' rest in tins filled with sand and sometimes kerosene, so that the installation will neither collapse nor be attacked by insects crawling up the structure. These tins also raise the bed to such an extent that the upper mattress may reach the chest, thus at the same time providing space under the umbrella bed where all sorts of objects can be hidden and stored.

It is said that the last generation used only mats, a bed made of mud and a wooden frame tied together with leather strings. The metal beds were incorporated into rural women's rooms during the 1960s. Initially shaped like hospital beds and used for sleeping, they became 'umbrella beds' during the 1970s. During the 1990s in the rural areas, they were still regarded as the most modern aspect of the 'things for the room', but were already going out of fashion in urban areas, where the wooden variety of the family bed was in vogue, decorated in different colours and shapes, such as 'shells', 'flowers' or 'Mercedes' cars.

Due to the size of rooms in cities and villages, it is rarely possible to have both the family and the umbrella bed in one and the same room. As a result, women had to decide which of the two they wanted to build up. It seems that unlike the last generation, present-day fashion favours the family bed rather than a construction that, while it looks like a bed, can only function as a shelving.

In addition to the above, wall and floor surfaces are central elements in women's room decoration. The walls are usually painted with a thin layer of light sand, and different wall hangings are fixed to them. Quite often, imported wall carpets are used, representing the contact with the wider world, glistening red with black and

green Spanish dancers, identified with Hajiya Falatiya, a singer from Sudan. Women who cannot afford such items of beauty will fix plaited mats on to their walls. Over the last couple of years, floors have become similarly colourful, being covered or inlaid with shining plastic materials, even in the remoter villages.

2. *Differences in life-style*

In some rooms, women's wealth consists of clay pots, calabashes, and baskets displayed on a clay shelf. In others, women might keep their industrially produced possessions in fragile plywood shelving, a more elaborate cupboard or a 'room-divider', accompanied by easy chairs, fancy beds, a video player, television, refrigerator and so forth. These variations are distributed throughout the fieldwork area, depending solely on the social background of the married couple and the people involved which style will be chosen.

For a better understanding of the variants, I distinguish four categories of styles of interior, namely the 'old style', the 'classical style', the 'modern style' and the 'upper-class style'.

- The 'old style' (Fig. 1) is characterised by the use of locally produced items. The bed is made of wood and leather strings or mud, the shelf of pots displays ceramics, wooden bowls, baskets and calabashes – all placed on top of one another – and a mud shelf protects this display from collapse. The walls are decorated solely with ornaments applied with natural colours like cow-dung, light soil and a mud 'stucco'.
- The distinctive aspects of a room in 'classical style' (Fig. 2) are more or less the same as those described in the previous section. This style was most common during the 1990s. Its characteristics are the umbrella bed, if possible in combination with the family bed, pots exhibited in a cupboard or a plywood room-divider, walls covered with carpets, and plastic objects arranged on the floor.
- The 'modern style' (Fig. 3) room lacks the umbrella bed and embroidered plywood shelf but is presented as a combination of room-divider, family bed, easy chairs and dressing mirror made from the same material and in the same style. At the beginning of 2002, a style which might be called 'antique' (cf. the German *Stilmöbel*) became fashionable, consisting of dark brown furniture, preferably made of teakwood or, in less well-off homes, re-sprayed elements which were originally painted the colour of milk with pink and green flowers. The pots on display were reduced in variation and represented one or two types only, mainly heat-resistant glass bowls or enamel cooking pots.
- The 'upper class style' (Fig. 4) had porcelain 'roses' – faiences brought from Italy – exhibited in metal or wooden shelvings, which not only had the space for electronic equipment – as is common in room dividers – but actually displayed such equipment too. The types of family bed in use copied icons of the Western market economy, such as the Mercedes: variations in style, or may-be one should call most of them 'non-style',

Fig. 1: The 'old style' is mainly furnished with locally produced items (all photos: Editha Platte).

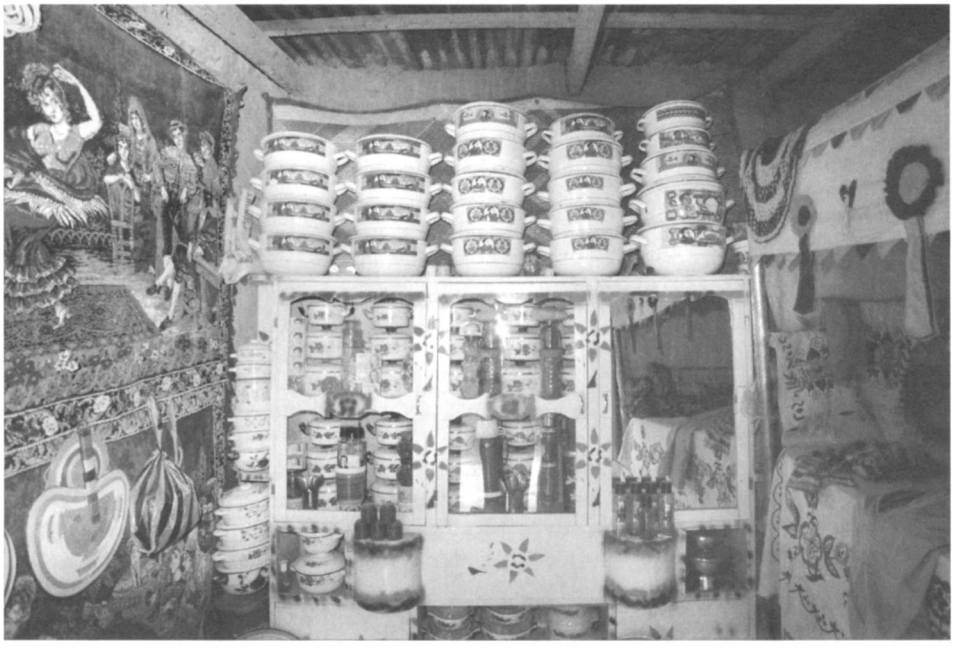

Fig. 2: The 'classical' style room is characterised by the umbrella or canopy bed to the right, the pots exhibited in the cupboard or the plywood room-divider opposite the entrance door and the walls covered with carpets and decorations.

Fig. 3: The 'modern room' furniture consists of a family bed, a room-divider, easy chairs and a dressing mirror, all made of the same material and in the same style.

Fig. 4: The 'upper-class' room has a variety of objects brought in from abroad (Europe or the Arab Peninsula) – displayed in metal or wooden shelvings in which electronic equipment is featured as well.

> are not only typical of the Nigerian context but also of something that might be more familiar to us, such as the German living room (*Wohnzimmer*), for example. As Sacks and Mitscherlich report (1980), many of the 'German Wohnzimmer' are also places where indulging a passion for fakes and accessories is more necessary than functional objects – more representative of the resident as a consumer than meaningful in a day-to-day context.

If one accepts the suggestion of the psychoanalyst Mitscherlich (1980:15) – that furniture constitutes words of sometimes immense symbolic power capable of creating a syntax allowing an insight into the personality of those who use objects, then one might ask what ideas are being transmitted through these arrangements. One answer can be found in the use of objects as representatives of social relationship (Cooper 1997, Baudrillard 1991). Another line of interpretation is that consumer goods are selected by individual actors because of their meaning in constructing social status (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). If we take 'class' as 'social practice', as Bourdieu (1987) did, then the analysis of the styles described above should be interpreted on a broader level, as it is not only an individual aesthetic but an analytic method of social set-ups and practices.

Based on this premise, my last period of fieldwork was partly concerned to establish a wider categorisation of the styles that are visible in the women's rooms. The parameters of the comparison were drawn according to locations in urban and rural areas and market towns like, for example, Spittler (1982) in his study of consumer differences in food and clothing in Niger – as well as to ethnic groups (Kanuri, Shuwa, Malguwa/Gamergu, Hausa), the age of the room's owner, the time of marriage, the period when the room was re-furnished, and the educational and professional background of the household heads, all important aspects of the dynamics of the rooms. The preliminary results of this study are:

1. The 'old style', featuring locally produced goods, was only found with women above seventy.
2. The 'classical style', with an umbrella bed and a variety of enamel and fire-resistant bowls, was found in urban settings, as well as in rural areas and market towns.
3. The 'modern style', with a family bed only and a limited variety of displayed pots, belonged to the future dreams of the village women, but not yet to their reality. The modern style was associated with a set of people who had a close connection with the modern middle class because of their educational background or their profession or both. They had primary or secondary education, in most cases the husband was a salary-earner, and basic English was spoken.
4. The 'upper class style', consisting of porcelain 'roses' in metal or wooden shelvings displayed side by side with electronic equipment, became most vibrant in settings where the traditional ruling elites – that is, relatives of the Shehu of Borno – and the new financial elites merged.

Industrially produced goods therefore provide a means of differentiating social status. Whereas the older styles and locally produced goods mainly mirrored differences of ethnic background, mass-produced items do not give m u c h insight into ethnicity, but rather into 'class' and social practice connected with a person's educational, professional and financial backgrounds. This was confirmed by a carpenter of modern furniture when I asked him about the taste and preferences of his customers. 'Which of the upper-class do you mean?', he said: 'the upper-rich or the upper-educated?'

Thus the objects discussed represent a version of 'African modernity/ies', where many of the newly introduced goods, originally meant as day-to-day consumer goods, are transferred to a sphere of prestige and of the representation of new identities that evolved in the twentieth century.

In discussing the woman's room, one question that arises is just who is allowed into the domestic sphere and is therefore in a position to estimate and judge the wealth, status and life-style of the room's owner. In a Muslim society, where many women live a secluded life, one might assume that only a few people will ever be allowed to see the objects so proudly displayed in the room. This is only partly true, since seclusion does not mean women being 'locked-up', that is, that they never leave the home or can never receive visitors. As Werthmann (1995:329) shows for urban Hausa, who are known to live in much stricter seclusion than Muslim women in north-eastern Nigeria, seclusion basically means that women should not leave their houses without their husband's permission. Her data actually shows that women find reasons, virtually on a daily basis, to leave their houses for such things as ceremonies, visits to close relatives or daily greetings, or, in the case of a larger group of people, to pay condolences to a bereaved family or for visits in connection with illnesses. These 'legitimate' reasons for leaving the house also provide an opportunity for brief visits to a friend's house to be made.

This is also supported by my own data from rural Kanuri society, where the woman's room is best described as a space where men are excluded more than women secluded. Since the private cannot be equated with the personal, access to women's rooms cannot be fully understood by being described in terms of the opposition between the private and the public: rather, they should be seen as a space where access is controlled mainly by women, but also by men. Besides women paying visits on a daily basis, such as relatives, neighbours, friends etc. (Platte 2000:146–150), or during ceremonies such as namings or weddings, where many not very familiar women have an opportunity to enter the room of mother or bride who is being honoured, a select group of men also has access to the room. These men belong to the group of close relatives, colleagues, friends of the woman's sons or husband, some of whom may enter the room, sitting for a while, while others merely offer a brief greeting, though they are still there long enough to see, evaluate and comment on the woman's possessions.

As I showed in 2001, the main strategies pursued in handling these possessions are the modification of objects in respect of their form, function and usage, their

destruction and re-working, and their transformation from one sphere (economic, social, religious) to another. However, this strategy, which can be regarded as the main method of integrating – a central strategy in the context of appropriation – is one of transferring ordinary goods from the profane world to the world of prestigious goods. This process was even evident in the first exposure of consumers in northern Nigerian to European-made goods.

3. The history of 'European' goods in northern Nigeria

As in other parts of the world, African contact with Europeans was initiated mainly by economic interests. However, only members of the ruling class could afford foreign goods. European vases, cooking utensils and Chinese porcelain were already in use in northern Nigeria in the nineteenth century. Favoured presents in 1870, carried by such explorers as Gustav Nachtigal (Petermann 1871), consisted of fancy chairs, guns, watches, telescope and materials such as velvets and silks.

Also interested in possessions that demonstrate wealth and power is the post-colonial ruling elite, as is demonstrated by certain specific aspects of 'representative consumption' (Beck 2001). This can be seen in, for example, the construction of large factories that were opened with lavish ceremonies, only to be abandoned shortly afterwards. Another example is the 'Local Government Secretariats' that were built all over Nigeria in a uniform architectural style during the campaign for democratisation at the beginning of the 1990s, structures which cattle herders now use as animal sheds. The largest Christian church, the 'Basilica of our Lady of Peace', which was built in the hometown of Felix Houphouet-Boigny, the first president of Ivory Coast, is another example for the favour of 'representative consumption'. Some statistics, presented by Harden (1993), further support this trend. In the 1980s, African elites consumed far more luxury goods than those in other nation states. Thus Sub-Saharan Africa, which has only half the population of China, imported six times as many cars as China in 1985.

Such an immense increase in imports and in the marketing of consumer goods required a considerable expansion of the distribution and transportation systems. The railway reached the central region of northern Nigeria (Kano) in 1912, came closer to the east in 1930 (Nguru), but reached Maiduguri, Borno State, only in 1964 (Mukhtar 2000). In other words, mass-produced objects took only forty years to become the dominant feature of the women's room. Supported with empirical data from my last period of fieldwork, that is, the end of the 1990s, of an average of 82 pots and plates exhibited in a woman's room 'shelving of pots', none was an object produced from local materials. This does not mean that all industrial goods are imported or imported from Europe.

A very large number of utensils come from Asia, for example, different styles of heat-resistant Pyrex pots in the shape of a 'canoe' (i.e. an oval shape), or more specifically from Indonesia, like special types of enamel cooking pots with conical walls. Other objects are made by Nigerian factories, some in the north.

One very common West African household object is a variation of the American invention of 1642, the 'Saugus pot', which had a volume of one litre and was made of iron with three stands (Panati 1994a). Today it is produced in West Africa as an aluminium cooking utensil, one which can carry a much larger quantity than the American version from which it derives.

Of greater importance in women's rooms is enamelware, the production of which started as 'Pioneer Enamel Ware' in Maiduguri in 1978. Before then, businessmen manufactured these utensils in Kano and distributed them all over the north. The fascination of these goods can well be imagined if one remembers that one of the best known traders in the business, Alhaji Godobe Mai Tasa, was named after the goods he manufactured and distributed, *tasa* being the vernacular for enamel dishes, and *mai* the term for 'trader' or 'owner' (thus his name means literally 'the owner or trader of enamel ware').[6]

Compared with enamel ware, the production of plastic objects is a more recent phenomenon. In Borno State, the only functioning company – 'Borno Plastic or BoPlas' – commenced production at the beginning of 2001 and still has a rather limited output. However, this does not affect Borno housewives, since they can fall back on an immense variety of objects manufactured in other regions of Nigeria. Thus distinctive shapes exist for every utensil needed in a household, for instance, a water kettle that is used for ablutions as well as a being toilet varies from company to company, so that, for example, the companies who were producing these containers in Kano in 2002 could be distinguished from the different styles of their water kettles.

The oil-boom years extended some prosperity to the mass of the population, enabling it to afford industrial products made in Europe, Asia, the Middle East or Nigeria. The 'sweet life', as many Nigerians call the 1960s and 1970s, has gone, at least since the introduction of the 'structural adjustment programme' in 1987, yet the need to use or simply own such goods still exists.

Quite often they are attractive and useful, that is, colourful and shiny, especially the latter. They are also often cheaper than their locally produced equivalents, depending on the individual category of objects. The cost of a local food flask, for example, which consists of a wooden black bowl (500 Naira), a basket used as a stand and another used as a cover (each 230 Naira) and a crocheted cover (150 Naira) was 1,110 Naira or 10.20 Euro in 1999, whereas the thermos food flask (450 Naira), also together with a crocheted cover, was 600 Naira or just 5.60 Euro only. Another example, which

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6 I thank Matthias Krings, who helped me sort out the different meanings of the term *mai* in Hausa and Kanuri.

shows that some locally produced objects are cheaper than those made industrially, is the water container: the approximately 60 litre clay pot costs 500 Naira or 4.70 Euro, whereas the plastic container (the black plastic 'elephant') of similar size was 5.60 Euro.

Sometimes foreign goods are also more efficient: for example, a thermos flask keeps food hot longer than a wooden bowl and can be carried more easily. Also they are often more comfortable to use, last longer and make some work easier: for example, modern dishes can be cleaned more easily, do not break easily and are less heavy. Often they have a global association, like the Sudanese Hajiya Falatiya carpet.

As David and Henning show, in their article 'The ethnography of pottery' (1972), based on fieldwork conducted at the of the 1960s in a small market-town in the north of Cameroon, the advantage of modern goods lies in their ability to represent not only wealth, but also economic and social capital in a diversity of ways.

All this led to a situation in which Nigeria's economic decline did not result in a decrease in the importance of such goods, nor did the government impose sanctions, as it did in the case of luxury goods such as champagne, whose import was prohibited. Instead, the cultural context of the transfer of goods was redefined, as is demonstrated in the immense increase and continued redefinition of the items required to conclude a marriage.

4. *The economy of love: transactions of wealth in cash and kind*

To go into detail concerning the different aspects of payments, counter-payments, prestations and customary payments would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, the statement of one of my research assistants, that 'Nobody gets married without leaving his relatives and friends in debt' indicates the importance of such exchanges of goods for the individuals and groups involved. My own experiences and documentation of marriage procedures – both the financial aspects and the transactions of goods and rituals required – support this statement (Platte and Gazali 1998). About five years ago, in 1997, I came across no less than 24 so-called 'customary payments'. These gifts are presented before, during and after the marriage has been contracted, a practice that relates to the Muslim Kanuri context of marriage: the prayer of the *fatia* made by a Koranic scholar and the payment of the 'bride wealth' (*sadawu*), both of which are necessary to officiate and to confirm the marriage formally at the wedding.

The 'additional', that is, 'customary payments or presents' included, for example, the 'gift of proposal', 'gift for asking a date' or money for Koranic scholars. Others were the 'gift for the village or ward head', but larger amounts also had to be distributed, such as the 'present for the representative' for other members of the family, the friends and many other people, who had to be considered individually.

Some of the payments involved have more the character of 'fees' than of presents, namely the 'sweat money', which has to be paid for the bride to leave her parental home, or the 'money for unveiling her head', 'for opening her mouth', and 'for her virginity'.

Compared with the gifts and payments of the 'olden days' of twenty or more years ago, prestations are regarded as the most innovative sphere, in both quality and quantity. Additional payments have been introduced, and payments that were formerly handed over as one lump sum are now distributed as more specific amounts. This change in the costs of a marriage is, however, rather difficult to evaluate because the complaint of the older generations about their loss of influence and power over the young in Kanuri society is as multi-layered as it is in other societies.

Not all the 'presents' or 'payments' mentioned above consist of money: some must be made in foodstuffs, others in kind. The latter are very often closely associated with the 'Western world', either because of the materials they are made of or the style they represent. To this category belong, for example, sets of garments (gowns and wrapping skirts), underwear, bras, shoes and handbags. Other items include body and room scents, soaps, cosmetics, cartons of sweets, packets of kola nuts and so forth.

Some gifts are presented in boxes, cartons or suitcases, while others are – at least nominally – handed over as 'the mother's calabash', the 'calabash of the aunts', the calabash for the grandmother or 'the calabash of mud', consisting of items symbolising the professional options of a child yet to be born.

This 'economy of love' culminates in the most important transaction of property, the dowry given to the bride by her father and mother. In this society, it is these gifts that are exhibited in the woman's room, thus representing an economic start for a newly married woman.[7]

In talking about the economic aspect of marriage, it might be useful to mention the actual prices of some of the objects and assemblages that are required to fit out a 'proper' room. Looking at the room as a whole, it can be said that, in round figures, the average wealth exhibited in the rural context was about 57,290 Naira or 546.40 Euro for a room furnished in the 'classical' style. In addition to the mobile wealth, the wardrobe costing about 80 Euro must be mentioned. This means that this is the lowest amount of wealth that women accumulated in their rooms in 1999, and that there was no upper limit, as one can see by comparing the interiors shown in the plates of the different styles of rooms (Figs. 1–4), and which is also illustrated by the fact that, whereas the shelving in the rural woman's room costed 6,600 Naira (62 Euro), in that year the room-divider alone used in the 'modern-style' costed 28,000 Naira (265 Euro). Going a little further into costs in relation to the assemblages categorised above, fur-

7 It should be noted that, unlike Cohen's (1971:66–68) classic study of Hausa migrants in Ibadan, conducted in early 1960s, when Hausa married women accumulated up to 500 enamel dishes in their rooms, out of which they gave some to their daughter at marriage, the women in my study buy new dishes and containers as part of their own dowry.

ther statements can be made. The first arrangement, the umbrella-bed, had a value of 13,100 Naira (128.80 Euro) and consisted of the bed itself, the mattress(es), the upper and lower canopies, pillows and a clock. The wall decoration (two carpets, one raffia mat, four raffia fans and two raffia plates) was worth 5,070 Naira or 47.50 Euro. The third arrangement, consisting of a shelf, two easy chairs and the dressing mirror, was worth 104.60 Euro. One must also add the approximately 82 enamel, Pyrex and metal containers and objects, such as the enamel trays, bottles of perfume, plates, thermos flasks, spoons, cups and cutlery displayed, worth 23,680 Naira (224.20 Euro). To make the 'things of the room' complete, one should not forget those objects which are actually used and which had an approximate value of 4,390 Naira (41.50 Euro). Objects used in the kitchen as cooking utensils are not included here, but their value might be approximately 8,245 Naira or 78 Euro, consisting of stoves, seats, mortars, cooking pots, water containers and carriers, raffia plates, knives, tins, fans and containers for washing.

5. Plastic pots and enamel ware as prestige goods

In evaluating the kinds of goods that are transferred at marriages, a central question is the relationship of the market value of the objects concerned to their symbolic value. What makes women in northern Nigeria consider what are, from the point of view of their European producers, utilitarian objects so desirable as prestige items for their rooms?

One answer certainly lies in the removal of these objects from market circulation, that is, their de-monetarisation and transformation from the sphere of everyday life into the environment of the exclusive, which in our case means their integration into the ritualised world of the economy of marriage and the exchange of presents. The transfer of ordinary goods into the arena of presents is, apart from sacralising them, a well-known aspect of the functional change of objects (Kohl 2000).

Another aspect is their increase in value: that is, the goods are too expensive for the masses to acquire easily, and there may be limited availability as well as restrictions in the possession or use of certain objects, foodstuffs etc. All these aspects may transport objects from the sphere of the ordinary on to the level of the exclusive.

However, our example of displays in women's rooms in northern Nigeria allows a glimpse of yet another central process of transformation. Objects have also become prestige items because their ordinary utilitarian value has been removed. The 'canopy' or 'umbrella bed', mentioned above, can no longer be used as a resting place. This is because of the materials of which it is made, as well as h o w it is made: it would just collapse. The dishes known as 'roses', which wealthy women like to display in their rooms, are so fragile that one hardly dares lift their lids, let alone serve food in them.

In the latter case, this initially rare and foreign prestige object, imported as a utility container, proved to be of hardly any use, and was therefore integrated into the display culture as a luxury item.

In many cases, the functionality of items does not appear to be their focus of interest. Many modern consumer goods can be mentioned in this respect, whose prestige value differs considerably from their actual worth: worn-out radios, broken clocks etc. These objects, unlike broken articles in the local culture, are not regarded as trash and thrown away, but transformed into prestige objects and proudly displayed in the woman's room.[8]

6. *Conclusion*

In this article, I have demonstrated that incorporation processes in respect of these women's rooms represent a selective and innovative approach to goods and to cultural imports. They cannot be fully understood in either the African or the European context on their own. Although they are an essential part of global interconnectedness, their Western roots still visible, they do not represent a homogeneous, unitary 'world culture'.

Compared with other cultural contexts in which industrially made goods are used, similarities and differences, coincidences and distinctions, are evident, both in the actual material forms of objects, and in how they are used and consumed. Whether it is the arrangement for Mami Wata described by Wendel (1991:274) – which, in the European sense, resembles more a colonial women's dressing-table than an altar – or the attributes of modernity used in the backdrops of the photo studios (Wendel 1991:281),[9] like the TV, sound system, sets of china and glasses, wall-clocks, flower vases etc., consumer goods are part of it. It does not even seem to be of much relevance whether such objects still work or have broken down. In the women's room, they are displayed in any case, and those that form the backdrop are never called on to 'function' technically.

When examining how goods that represent modernity are consumed and how this consumption is staged and performed, the woman's room combines some of the alternatives I have mentioned. During their initial integration into the women's world, during the wedding ceremonies and later also during naming ceremonies etc., the

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8 This development might be compared to the first glass mirrors that fourteenth-century Venetian women displayed around their necks, regardless of whether the mirror was already tarnished or whether one still could see one's image in it (Panati 1994b).

9 Room decoration and the photographic studio also show another parallel, for example, a similar lifespan: introduced in Ghana in the 1870s and 1880s, the latter showed signs of Africanisation in the 1940s and finally evolved into a truly original photographic practice in Ghana (Wendel 2001:276).

goods are displayed in a ritualised manner. Afterwards, during their lives inside women's rooms, they are celebrated and idealised as prestige goods by most of the members of society, albeit in different 'styles' or 'categories' (as the carpenters would say). As such, modernity as staged in women's rooms is not just an urban phenomenon but also a reality in rural areas.

In the context of globalisation and modernisation, what are most notable are those processes that indicate that the so-called receiving cultures do not accept cultural imports in an unmodified manner but handle these foreign goods selectively. And although I am well aware of circumstances in which Western dominance has resulted in the collapse of entire traditional craft complexes,[10] the analysis of the above examples shows that other ways of interacting are also possible.

In the extreme case, the goods are rejected entirely, as in fundamentalist reactions that attempt to protect themselves against everything they consider a threat to their own cultural values (e.g. the *pieds nus* movement in Mali that emerged in 1982/83).[11] In other cases, it is through the active integration and consumption of imported commercial products – or foreign ideas – that we can observe the strongest manifestations of cultural or national identity – a possible example of the 'ineffectiveness' of globalisation. Again, in some cases these goods are destroyed. Through this destructive, potlach-style act, they are transformed into social prestige, or else incorporated into new uses after being destroyed or dismantled (i.e. recycled). Apart from this transformation of foreign objects into social prestige through their destruction, according to Kohl (2000) further central processes have been noted in the integration of European goods, including sacralisation (e.g. nails and mirrors worked into fetishes) and de-monetarisation (a commodity transformed into a present, e.g. as bride wealth), processes which the examples in this article have made partially visible.

In order to integrate mass-produced goods into everyday life as either utilitarian or prestige objects, their transformation and differentiated handling are of the utmost importance. Such commodities are not re-contextualised in their meaning, but also changed in material and external form, as the examples of the 'umbrella bed', enamel ware and the plastic water kettle have shown.

These goods may therefore be cited as exemplifying the phenomenon of 'African modernity', where the focus of interest is not the search for a presumably lost origin, but an autonomous African present. It is not my intention to deny the sometimes dis-

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10 Examples where globalisation has led to the collapse of an entire craft complex include the introduction of the diesel engine into the Nile valley, where as a consequence a 2000-year-old irrigation culture was abandoned (Beck 2000), the introduction of industrially produced fabrics, and the worldwide marketing of second-hand clothes.

11 According to information from the Internet (http://www.hrwf.net/Francais/mali98fr.html, dated 5.8.2001), the *pied nus* are a Islamic fundamentalist movement, active in Mali, which was founded in 1982/83 with roots in Burkina Faso and Guinée-Conakry. The *pieds nus* reject not only the wearing of shoes but of every Western influence (clothing, medicine, national state taxes etc.).

astrous repercussions of Western-dominated globalisation on non-European and non-American cultures, but rather to recognise that, whether the objects bear traces of Western iconography or not, they may represent the identity and value systems not of their producers or inventors, but of the people who have integrated them into their own lives.

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