

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – III Issue -III (May-June) 2025

Frequency: Bimonthly



Animal skins transformation and development into clothing and decorative items in Ngaoundéré from 1958 to 2021

ATOUKAM TCHEFENJEM Liliane Dalis

Departments of History and Tourism, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH), The University of
Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

| **Received:** 04.02.2025 | **Accepted:** 08.02.2025 | **Published:** 22.05.2025

***Corresponding author:** ATOUKAM TCHEFENJEM Liliane Dalis

Departments of History and Tourism, Faculty of Arts, Letters and Social Sciences (FALSH), The University of
Ngaoundéré, Cameroon.

Abstract

Accessories are items of clothing added to the main garment to emphasize or modify certain features. They have both a utilitarian and symbolic function, and include objects with a variety of functions: ornamental, conventional. They are made up of various types of ornaments and jewelry. In Ngaoundéré, the use of leather accessories dates back to the eve of Cameroon's independence, coinciding with the creation of the city in 1958. The Adamaoua region, with Ngaoundéré as its capital, is considered to have the largest herd of cattle in Cameroon. As a result, cattle hides play a vital role in the processing of many accessories. The same applies to sheep and goat skins, which are raised in large numbers in the region. The aim of this article is to identify the production techniques used for these items of clothing and decoration, as well as their value-added. The methodology used takes into account oral, written, iconographic, electronic and material sources. Several informants were identified in Ngaoundéré based on their knowledge of the subject. Thus, butchers, hide collectors, tanners, craftsmen, sellers and enthusiasts of hide and leather objects and professionals were interviewed. The beauty of accessories depends on their colors, cuts, materials and patterns. They include shoes, hats, handbags, pendants, bracelets and belts, and are in great demand not only by the local population, but also by foreigners. Beyond their function as clothing, they have many other functions: decorative, military, religious and security. Despite the abundance of cattle and hides collected in Ngaoundéré, the objects made from this material are for the most part manufactured in Maroua and marketed in Ngaoundéré only by resellers. In 2021, they are prey to financial, material and technical difficulties, which are really hampering their growth and the economic and tourist development of Ngaoundéré.

Keywords: accessories, leather, decoration, aesthetics, Ngaoundéré, skin

INTRODUCTION

Ngaoundéré is located in the Adamawa region of Cameroon, on a plateau known as the "Adamawa highland". It is the region's capital and an important trading and business crossroads, since it is an essential road transport link between the towns in the south of the country and those in the far north of Cameroon.¹ Ngaoundéré is one of Central Africa's leading livestock-producing areas. Thus, the study of the transformation and valorization of animal skins into clothing and ornamental accessories in Ngaoundéré from 1958 to 2021 is not accidental. Indeed, although the town is located in a region that offers enormous potential for the development of pastoral activities, in 2021 it has no leather processing plant. The various accessories come from the Far North, and are also marketed by people from this region. What's more, the handicraft sector is struggling to really take off due to a number of obstacles. Ngaoundéré, which literally means "navel mountain" in the Mboum language, was chosen as the geographical setting for this study.², located on a high plateau at an altitude of 1,200 m, this sparsely populated savannah landscape offers opportunities for cattle breeding, with the Gudali³ zebu the predominant species in the area. The town is home to a multitude of ethnic groups, but the majority of them are pastoralists, the "Foulbé"⁴. While beef, goat and mutton are generally sought after for their meat for consumption, it goes without saying that they are also involved in other industries. Although their skins are consumed, they are also processed and valued for aesthetic, military, religious and security purposes. We also realize that this raw material for the manufacture of various accessories is becoming increasingly scarce, as it is more and more in demand by a growing number of consumers as a result of cultural mixing and demographic progress. This study

¹ Ngaoundéré is the Transcameroonian terminus (train linking the capital to the north of the country), as well as the starting point for tourist circuits to the north, in particular to the Benoué, Faro and Bouabandjiah national parks.

² <https://www.editions2015.com/cameroun/index.php/villes-du-cameroun/ngaoundere/>. Literally, "Ngaou" in the Mboum language means mountain and "ndere" navel, hence mountain with a navel. The city was so named by its first inhabitants, called Mboum, who took inspiration from Mount Ngaoundéré, a small hill with a large rock at the top, to name their village. This site, the symbol of the city, is a major tourist attraction.

³ The Goudali or Gudali is a West African breed of cattle. Goudali means "horned and short-legged" in the Hausa language.

⁴ The Foulbé or Peul are the largest ethnic group, speaking the Fulfulde language. They are a people of pastoralists and warriors living in northern Cameroon and on the plateau, the purest type being found among the Bororo nomads. The Foulbé are found throughout West Africa, in Cameroon, Chad, Sudan, and to a lesser extent in Central Africa, Congo and, more rarely, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This people lived essentially off livestock until the arrival of the colonizers, during which time they had already founded two great empires: the Macina Fulani Empire (vassal of the Mali Empire in the 15th century, then Songhai) and the Sokoto Fulani Empire. Islam was introduced to Cameroon in the 18th century. Foulbé pastoralists settled in the region now known as Adamaoua. In 1806, a Fulani chief named Otman Dan Fodio, a fervent Muslim, reigned over a large empire. He decided to launch a holy war and handed over the standard to a certain Adama. Adama conquered the entire country now known as Adamaoua, or Adama's country.

describes the transformation and valorization of hides and skins into various accessories in Ngaoundéré between 1958 and 2021. The main aim is to analyze the dynamics of clothing and ornamental accessories in the city of Ngaoundéré over the historical period specified. This analysis leads to a study of the transformation of animal skins and their valorization into shoes, hats, handbags, pendants, bracelets, belts, poufs and fans in Ngaoundéré, and to a focus on the main distributors and the difficulties that affect the growth of this sector of activity.

Figure no 1 : Study Area Presentation

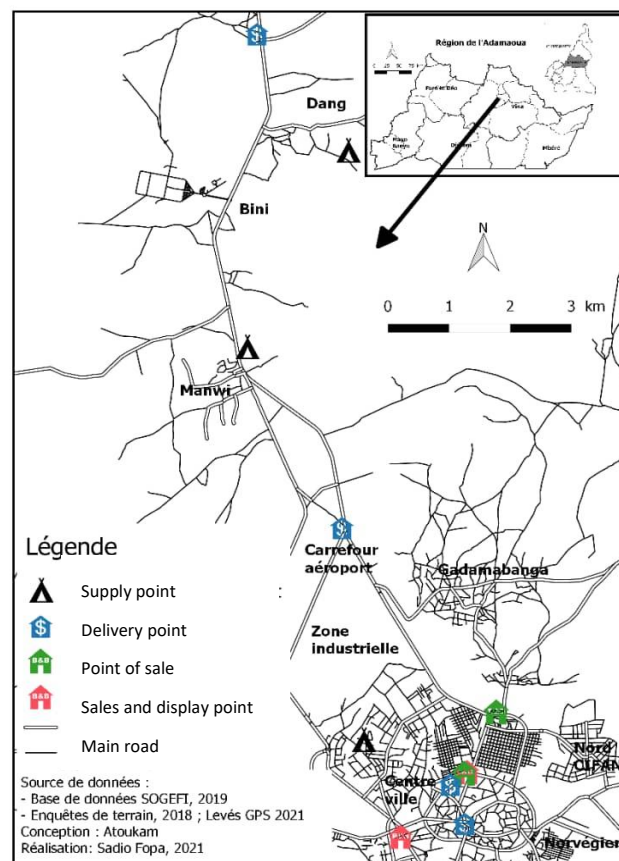


Figure 1 shows the main supplying, delivery, sales and exhibition points for cattle skins in Ngaoundéré. The city is made up of three Sub-Divisions (Ngaoundéré 1, 2 and 3). But the slaughterhouses that represent the main supply points are more concentrated in Ngaoundéré 3rd, notably in Manwi, Dang and Tchabbal, while the only slaughterhouse supplying Ngaoundéré 1st and 2nd is the municipal slaughterhouse located in the Baladji II district. Ngaoundéré 1er has an industrial abattoir that has been slow to get up and running. It is located in the Wakwa district. However, it should be noted that the main points of sale for leather goods are the small market and the railway station. The artisan showcase is also an exhibition and sales point. Other delivery points for the skins collected are the airport crossroads, the road from Dang to Tchabbal, and Ngaoundéré's small and large markets.

I- ACTORS AND ANIMAL SKIN PROCESSING IN NGAOUNDERE

Studying the actors and processes of animal hide processing means e actors behind this transformation. In fact, the animals sought for their skins in Ngaoundéré are generally pets such as cattle (*Bos taurus indicus*), goats (*Capra aegagrus hircus*), sheep (*Ovis aries*)

and rarely reptiles such as the boa snake (*Boa constrictor*), crocodile (*Crocodylinae*) and varanus (*Varanus*).

1.1. The actors

Those involved in processing animal skins fall into two categories. Firstly, those who supply the raw material, including nomadic and sedentary Fulani and tanning professionals. The first category mainly concerns the Bororo people living in Adamaoua and therefore in Ngaoundéré. They practice Transhumance in search of pasture for their cattle, and migrate between Cameroon and neighboring countries such as Nigeria, Central African Republic and Chad. The number of sedentary Bororo therefore remains small, and considerably affects the development of structures designed to support them. (Djalla, 1980 : 6).

The sedentarized Fulani are also skins⁵ suppliers. Apart from the Diamaré plain in the Far North and the Benoué Basin, they are also present in the Adamaoua highlands. They are organized into lamidats, headed by lamibé, who are supreme and spiritual chiefs. They have numerous herds of cattle, goats and sheep, which they use for food and skins.

Then there's the second category of actors involved in animal skin processing. This is the work of specialists in artisanal tanning, followed by professionals in industrial tanning⁶. However, it's worth mentioning the bankruptcy of the various factories in Ngaoundéré in the 1980s.

Indeed, Cameroon's wealth of livestock had prompted government authorities to create industries for processing animal skins and making shoes. In October 1977, the first tannery and shoe factory was commissioned 20 km from Ngaoundéré⁷. This was an initiative of the Tannery and Skin-processing Company of Cameroon (TSCC). During the same period, BATA-CAMEROUN was active in the footwear sector with Cameroon Shoe Company. Ltd. (CSC) and the Cameroonian Shoe Company (CHAUSCAM). Several other companies were involved in leather goods, including Travel and Leather good Production (MAVEM AFRIC), Industrial Cases Company and Cameroon Industrial Leather Company (SIMACA). Over time, all these companies eventually closed their doors (Djalla, 1980 : 8).

In 1984, TSCC ceased operations, but a financial contribution from the Western African French Company (WAFC) enabled the revival in 1985 of the Industrial Tannery of Cameroon (TANICAM) (Seck et al., 1980: 185), which resumed production, only to close two years later. Its facilities were bought out by a businessman from Maroua, who set up the Nouvelle Tannerie du Cameroun (NOTACAM), the country's only modern tanning factory operating until 2021, whose products are mainly for export. (Wassouni, 1998 : 206).

It's worth noting that despite the closure of various craft companies, Ngaoundéré in particular, local artisans have not ceased their activities. These include shoemaking, leather goods and basketry.

The leather used in these activities comes for the most part from Maroua, precisely from NOTACAM where the skins are more carefully crafted⁸. As the informant said, "Leather has been coming from Maroua for a long time now, due to the closure of the Industrial Tannery of Ngaoundéré. However, we haven't stopped with our shoemaking, leather crafting and basketry activities".⁹ It's clear, that only a pet's skins are dried and sold by butchers, or even at the town's slaughterhouses. Two images presenting some tanners and families of tanners (photos n°1 and n°2) were made available to us during on-site surveys.

Picture 1: Young tanners in the 1990s



Source : Ismaïla Yaya, Ngaoundéré 1990

Picture 2: Family of tanners



Source : Ismaïla Yaya, Ngaoundéré 1990

Picture No. 1 presents a group of five actors in an artisanal tannery in Ngaoundéré during the 1990s. It should be noted that, despite the fact that some of these tanners have since passed away, the majority of them are still living in 2021, albeit in their advanced years. Notably, one of them, Ismaïla Yaya (third from left to right), continues to be engaged in this traditional craft.

Picture No 2 shows a family of tanners in Ngaoundéré around 1990. As shown, most of them are holding a single pair of sleepers to show the result of their work.

⁵ Al Hadj Souley, 79 years, tanner, interviewed on March 17th 2021 at Bamyanga.

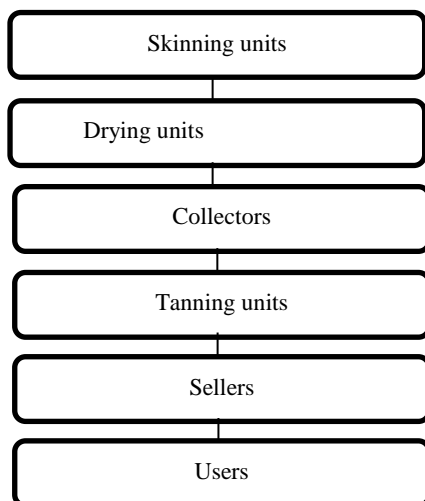
⁶ Wemba Kameni, 72 years, former technician of TANICAM, interviewed on March 29th 2021 at Joli soir.

⁷ The site selection is based on Adamawa being predominant in Cameroonian breeding.

⁸ Moustapha Hamadou, 45 years, Leathers articles seller, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at *petit marché* of Ngaoundéré.

⁹ Waziri Ndongadaba, 51 years, artist-painter, Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at *petit marché* of Ngaoundéré.

Figure n°2 : Diagram presenting the actors involved in skin processing and development in Ngaoundéré



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

The organizational chart of the actors in the skin processing and sales chain is shown in figure 2. From on-site surveys, it appears that artisanal tanning in Ngaoundéré is an activity that is passed down from father to son. It has been practiced for generations by the same families. After the animals have been slaughtered, the skimmers remove the hides, which are then dried, collected and made available to the tanners for processing. The processed objects are then made available to sellers and finally to end-users. However, this industry is gradually being abandoned in Ngaoundéré in favor of imported items such as skai (a synthetic-coated fabric that imitates leather) and genuine leather from the West.

For processing, the animal hide must first be obtained from artisanal or modern slaughterhouses. Ngaoundéré has two main slaughterhouses. An old one and a modern one operational since January 9, 2018. The latter represents one of the largest slaughterhouses in the country. Indeed, the Adamawa region alone accounts for 38% of beef production in Cameroon¹⁰. However, it should be noted that this slaughterhouse is struggling to operate at full capacity, as it is still shunned by livestock farmers in favor of the traditional slaughterhouses at Manwi, Dang and the Ngaoundéré municipal abattoir. These slaughterhouses offer cattle hides, which are a major asset in the development of this sector, and which are processed using both traditional and industrial methods. Some processors also buy from butchers. With regard to sheep and goat skins, some collectors obtain their supplies from sellers of grilled meat, known locally as soya, especially after the *Tabaski* feast, whose ritual requires the immolation and consumption of sheep meat, as the quantity of sheep skins obtained at the end of the feast is large and much sought-after by buyers.

I.2. Animal skin Processing

These are the processes involved in transforming hides into leather, the raw material used in the manufacture of clothing accessories and ornaments. Because of its characteristics, the membrane that envelops and externally covers the bodies of cattle, sheep, goats and other reptiles is the main raw material used in tanning. Al Hadj

Souley¹¹ said that, several stages are involved in the process of transforming skins into materials that can be used to make objects.

It all starts with the slaughter of the animal. This operation takes place in slaughterhouses with very rudimentary facilities. The animal is killed on the ground, according to the Muslim rite, by cutting the throat near the head. Then comes the skinning phase, carried out by non-professional skimmers, which is an obstacle to adding value to hides and skins, since over 38% of the hides and skins produced are of poor quality (Djalla, 1980 : 45).

The preliminary tanning operations involve separating the skin from the carcass muscles. This separation is carried out by skimmers, especially at traditional slaughterhouses in Ngaoundéré, the extracted skins are placed where they receive heat from the sun, as shown in images 3, 4, 5 and 6.

It's a delicate process that requires lots of attention especially if good quality leather is to be obtained, as the butchering of slaughtered animals must be done with great care and intelligence to avoid making holes on them (Wassouni, 2011: 50). Indeed, a good skin must be intact and free of cracks, cuts and holes.

Skinning is carried out on the ground. As with cattle, skinning is often carried out by tearing. Knives are used only to remove the most adherent parts of the skin, where there is a risk of tearing. Double-edged knives are used simultaneously for slaughtering, skinning and cutting. These sharp knives are the main cause of major damage such as holes, hence the need to use skinning knives.

Picture no 3 : Goat Skin



Picture no 4 : Sheep skin



Picture no 5 : Cow skin



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

¹⁰ The region economics is largely constituted by extensive traditional breeding or half-intensive *ranching*. It's Cameroon biggest breeding region with 1 800 000 cattle.

¹¹ Al Hadj Souley, 79 years, tanner, interviewed on March 17th 2021 at Bamyanga.

Once the animal has been skinned, it is fleshed, which consists in removing the pieces of flesh and fat that have stuck to the skin in certain places. If tanning is not carried out immediately on freshly harvested skins, conservation treatment is essential. For fresh skins, several preservation processes are used: floor-drying, frame-drying, bar-drying and rope-drying. However, the duration of drying depends on climatic conditions. In Ngaoundéré, it lasts three (03) to four (04) days in the dry season and one week to ten days in the rainy season. The tanning operation can therefore begin once the skin treatment has been completed.

Picture No 6: Displayed Cow skin after skinning at Baladji II slaughterhouse



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Tanning is a process during which skins are transformed into leather using tannins¹². In Ngaoundéré, tanning was practiced on an artisanal basis in rural areas, although it was industrialized in the tannery and leather factory in the 1980s. Artisanal or traditional tanning was the work of a few families from which the actors originate, as shown in figure 2.

I.3. Leather supplying, selling and scarcity

It's worth pointing out that, despite the sale of articles made from skins in Ngaoundéré, leather has become scarce. In the opinion of some, the closure of the Ngaoundéré tannery some forty years ago is the main reason for this¹³. The absence of this factory affects the manufacture of leather goods. Craftsmen are often forced to turn to second-hand goods in search of leather from abroad, due to the lack or cost of leather¹⁴. The high price of skins is also due to the influence exerted by foreigners with a view to exporting leather to their home countries or continents. In addition, large quantities of skins are exported by Nigerians to their own countries," explained a shoemaker and leatherworker¹⁵.

The informant explains:

¹² Various substances which enable to form a Decomposable skin, reacting to warm water and very hydrated to a non-decomposable substance, resistant to warm water and less hydrated.

¹³ Idrissou Lélé, 50 years, artisan, interviewed on March 18th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase.

¹⁴ Mohammadou Aminou, 33 years, artisan, interviewed on March 18th 2021 at Joli-soir.

¹⁵ Youbi Dority, 59 years, shoemaker- leatherworker, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase.

There was a modern tannery (TANICAM), which was of great benefit to the people of Ngaoundéré. Today, everything is within Chinese control. Before the beef is sold, its skin is already reserved by foreigners, who buy it at a high price. They even go so far as to bribe butchers and other skin sellers to obtain as many skins as possible¹⁶.

This explains the scarcity of raw skins and especially leather in the town of Ngaoundéré after the closure of TANICAM. What's more, most of the leather and even leather goods sold in Ngaoundéré come from Maroua, which still has the only skin-processing factory (NOTACAM), a craft center and accessories of acceptable quality, as reported by most of our informants¹⁷.

Once the hide has been transformed into leather, collectors or buyers source it for a variety of reasons. Nationally, buyers are small manufacturers of beauty accessories. In the case of Ngaoundéré, most buyers travel to the Far North to obtain leather, where they report it as being more affordable¹⁸.

In the past, the sale of leather in Cameroon was controlled by the STPC or Société des Tanneries et Peausseries du Cameroun. It exported undyed leathers known as "stains", although sales were also made in the villages via traditional tanners.

Prices depended on the size of the cattle, goats and sheep. Between 1958 and 1980, the cost of a cattle skin was between 1000 and 2000 FCFA, a goat skin between 300 and 1000 FCFA and a sheep skin between 300 and 1200 FCFA¹⁹. With a shortage of reptile skins, prices for boa snakes ranged from 1,500 to 5,000 FCFA. The bigger the animal size, the higher the price. From 1985 to 2021, the cost of cattle skins ranged from 5,000 to 15,000 CFA francs²⁰ and from 8000 to 50000 francs CFA²¹. This raise in price originate from the population growth and multiculturalism in the city. Other reasons are the high demands from the populations of the South-Cameroon in cattle skins, the Bamiléké and « *Bamenda people* »²² in particular. In their traditional cookings, these tribes use animal skins. The Bamilékés use cattle and goat (*Gouop naah*) skins for dishes like « *Kondrè* » and « *Taro accompanied with yellow stew*. (Atoukam, 2018 : 89).

In the North-West and South-West regions of Cameroon, the Bakweri and *Bamenda people* for instance, cooking « *water fufu*

¹⁶ Youbi Dority, 59 years, shoemaker- leatherworker, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase.

¹⁷ Idrissou Hamadou, 50 years, shoemaker-leatherworker, Youbi Dority, 59 years, shoemaker-leatherworker, Wang Mamouda, 58 years, committee president of the Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase Center, group interview, on March 18th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase

¹⁸ Sali Alidou, 63 years, Salifou, 68 years, Yaya Oumarou, 57 years, buyers, group interview, on March 15th 2021 in Dang.

¹⁹ Idrissou Hamadou, 50 years, shoemaker-leatherworker, interviewed on March 18th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase..

²⁰ Sali Abassi, 68 years, butcher, interviewed on March 23rd 2021 at Manwi's butchery.

²¹ Mohammadou Ynoussa, 52 years, butcher, interviewed on March 23rd 2021 at Dang's butchery.

²² Bassirou Saidou, 48 years, leather articles seller, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at *petit marché* of Ngaoundéré.

and eru » and « *ashu* »²³ requires the use of animal skins, that they usually call “*Kanda*”. The point of sale for this meat is the main butcher's shop in the small market, where whole heads of beef and hides that have already been flamed and scraped are on sale. Prices range from 2,000 to 3,500 FCFA. In 2020, new sales outlets spread throughout the city: the CONGELCAM and Dang markets. According to consumers, the price of beef hide has risen considerably in 2021. In the 1990s, it was a gift²⁴, says a seller of “*water fufu and eru*” and “*ashu*”. Moustapha Hamadou²⁵ thinks that, The real problem with the scarcity of skins and the population's lack of interest in handicrafts in Ngaoundéré relates to the evolution of clothing. Leather isn't compatible with water, which is why skai is mostly used. Professionals²⁶ of the Transforming and developing of leather in Ngaoundéré think that, in 2021, the influence of Europe and Asia on the clothing styles of Africans in general, and Cameroonians in particular, is evident. “Everything comes from Europe and especially Asia,” they say. Almost all the products imported into our markets bear the “*Made in China*” mark, which is the major cause of Africa's poverty. As a result, part of Africa's cultural heritage is tending to disappear if nothing is done to save it. Finally, they assert that this sector needs real political will if it is to blossom and really get off the ground.

II. LEATHER VULGARISATION AS CLOTHING AND DECORATIVE ITEMS

Leather is made from the skin of an animal, mainly used for clothing and decoration in a wide variety of items²⁷.

Leather also refers to the skin covering of large animal species (cattle, horses, camels), and hide to the skin covering of small domestic or wild animal species (goats, sheep, zebras, etc.). Professionals, including shoemakers and leatherworkers, are responsible for turning them into beauty accessories.

II.1. Items for clothing

In this context, clothing accessories refer to all the elements people use to dress themselves and enhance their appearance. In other words, they are clothing items added to the main garment to emphasize certain features or modify it.

II.1.1. Clothings

Animal skins rank among the first adornments of the human body (Lebeuf, 1946: 78). In the past, people went without clothing, and the first material used to make clothes, especially in the northern part of Cameroon, was animal skins (Fimigue, 1997: 39). With the Islamization of the population, these garments were soon abandoned in favor of larger loincloths²⁸. In 2021, skin garments are no more than accessories kept by photographers as a reminder

of times gone by (photo 7). However, they are available to the public, whose interest in these garments is evident in the photos taken during Christian and Muslim calendar holidays. One of the most prominent locations is the university campus at Dang in the Ngaoundéré 3rd Sub-Division. The following images illustrate these popular outfits worn by young female students and other followers (pictures 8 and 9).

Pic no 7 : Female skin-made clothing (bodice and skirt)



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Pic no 8: Family vulgarizing skin-made clothing



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Pic no 9 : Student wearing skin-made clothes



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

²³ Local way of calling the dish.

²⁴ Mbeng Anna, 47 years, restaurant worker, interviewed on March 25th 2021 at Gabriel junction.

²⁵ Moustapha Hamadou, 41 years, leather articles seller, interviewed on March 23rd 2021 at Ngaoundéré *petit marché*.

²⁶ Bassirou Saidou, 48 years, leather articles seller, Ahmadou Oumarou, 68 years, artisan, Ibrahim Nassourou, 60 years, tanner, group interview of March 19th 2021 at Ngaoundéré *petit marché*.

²⁷ <https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cuir>.

²⁸ As prescribed in Islamic regulations, women should dress decently by entirely covering their bodies, the exception with the face and hands.

Picture N°7 shows a complete skin made bodice and skirt on a red background. It's an outfit made from sheepskin. The photographer who owns it, said that this outfit helps him to “earn a living”²⁹. Many women ask for it to be photographed. This renewed interest in skin garments reflects people's infatuation with their culture, and more so with this abandoned style of dress, which is giving rise to new elements of artistic creativity in contemporary African societies in general, and in Cameroon in particular.

II.1.2. Shoes

Other clothing accessories made by craftsmen are shoes. Several cuts have been innovated since their appearance in Ngaoundéré outlets. The best-known cuts were worn by the nobility, notably the *ngouroudjé*.³⁰ (Wassouni, 2012 : 153). Other specimens were solicited by shepherds and other enthusiasts.

Between 1980 and 2021, leather shoes came in a variety of cuts: open, closed, with heels or without. They are available for men, women and children in sizes ranging from 20 to 45 (photos 10, 11, 12). In the past, colors were less varied. They were mainly available in beige and brown. Gradually, the range has evolved to include other backgrounds such as blue, orange, yellow, green, red and violet...

Pic no 10 : Females *skai* made brown slippers



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Pic no 11 : Males slippers orned with golden strips



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Pic no 12 : leather and skin made samaras

²⁹ Saliou, 43 years, photograph, interviewed on March 26th 2021 on Dang university campus.

³⁰ Fulbé term reffering to skin-made shoes and reserved for the nobles in *lamidats*.



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

The shoes shown in photo 10 are essentially made from *skai*. The latter is sourced mainly from Douala, Cameroon's economic capital, from neighboring Nigeria and increasingly from China, while those in photo 12 are made from bovine, ovine and caprine leather. Commonly known as “samaras”, they are particularly popular with students, people from southern Cameroon and, eventually, tourists. These were the first known cuts in Ngaoundéré in 1958. Photo 11 shows babouches with closed fronts, mainly used by men. Their design testifies to the creativity of the craftsmen. In addition to women's samaras, there are other cuts (photo 13) and men's models (photos 14 and 15). Abdoul Razak³¹ thinks that these are the classic models.

Picture no 13 ,14 and 15 : Male and Females leather shoes



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

³¹ Abdoul Razak, 40 year, shoemaker-leatherworker, interviewed on March 26th 2021 at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase.



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

While most shoes come from Maroua, some models are made by craftsmen based in Ngaoundéré (photos 16 and 17). Faced with the scarcity of locally-produced leather, they transform *skai* and sometimes genuine leather, which they buy in second-hand goods from abroad.

Pic no 16 : Shoemaker-leatherworker working in *petit marché*



Pic no 17 : A shoemaker-leatherworker making males slippers



Besides clothing, artisans also produces necklaces, hats, handbags and jewellery.

The hats are highly demanded by shepherds to protect themselves from the sunlight (rays), especially when they're tending herds. They are made by basketry techniques, with leather strips at the edges. Few sellers like cola(*Cola acuminata*) sellers, get it for themselves to avoid Heat waves in markets. Other female items are produced such as: handbags, pouches, wallets, travel cases, bracelets, necklaces, and hair ornaments.

Handbags are included in women's aesthetics. From skin-made handbags, there are varieties with different cuts.

Pictures No 18, 19 and 20: Female skin-made handbags



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

The pictures 19,19 and 20, show shoulder strap handbags which are highly demanded by young ladies. The choice depends on their preferences. Whereas, more mature ladies prefer pouches and

wallets. Males also have their preferences (picture 21 and 22) and there are mixed designs (picture 23).

Picture no 21 : Shoulder strap



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Picture no 22 : Wallets



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Picture no 23 : Bag



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Picture n°21 showcase a male shoulder strap bag. It's design is particular due to the presence of cowry, placed in the middle as ornament and at the center of the sewed African continent. It is highly demanded by youths who wish to express their pride in being Africans. Some students affirmed that it is to promote and develop solidarity between Africans. Thus, by wearing these items, youths demonstrate their vision for the African continent

development and the diaspora, for a worldwide African community. As Higbeno Solange³² said, some of these bags are often ordered from Europe and that she sometimes offer some to her family as gifts. It's tempting to say that this vision, which is close to Pan-Africanism, is a way out for thinking about how to lessen the burdens on Africa, especially youth unemployment. However, given the difficulties associated with the balkanization of the continent, border issues and, above all, the selfishness of African states divided into small, non-viable³³ economic areas, such thinking remains unachievable.

Picture n° 22 shows wallets in unique colors, popular with men. In the background, a ladies' handbag with distinctive designs. Picture no. 23 shows a leather bag in a different style (decorated with laces and strings). According to the sellers, the used appearance of this bag simply refers to its extensive display in markets. In fact, these are unsold items that are damaged due to a bad weather. As a result, they are made available to all buyers at a lower price.

From the artisan³⁴, the bags shown above are made from leather. Wallets are mostly demanded by male customers, while women are particularly fond of purses. The model shown in picture 23, is less and less in demand. The leather accessories also includes jewelry, as illustrated in pictures below. These are mainly bracelets and pendants (pictures 24, 25 and 26). They are complemented by belts, rings, anklets and leggings. It's worth noting, however, that the natives of the Far North in general, and of Adamaoua in particular, are more interested in amulets than in any other object. These amulets, still known locally as "*gris-gris*", are part of the tradition of Islamic peoples in general. These are generally necklaces, bracelets and pelvic belts designed for protection. They are made from animal skins and are used by adults of all ages and sexes. They are also worn around children's waists, wrists and necks to ward off evil spirits. The people who believe it wear them without hesitation.

Picture no 24 : Leather-made bracelets with cowries ornaments



Picture no 25 : Bracelet orned with cowries worn by a young lady

³² Higbeno Solange, 31 years, devotee and user of leather-made articles, interviewed on March 21st 2021, at *petit marché*.

³³ <https://fr.m.wikipedia.org>.

³⁴ Ahmadou Oumarou, 48 years, artisan, interviewed on March 19th 2021 at Ngaoundéré *petit marché*.



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Picture no 26 : Pendants with cowries



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

However, used items reassure customers about quality and usefulness, since it's worth pointing out that new cuts discourage customers because of the stench they give off. Many users agree with this. Pictures 24, 25 and 26 highlight jewelry. The first picture shows a set of beige, brown and black bracelets. Each bracelet is accompanied by a cowrie shell, reflecting the existence and value of shell in African culture generally, and particularly in Cameroon. These cowries are also used as ornaments on pendants showed in picture n°26. It's worth noting that cowries played an important role in the African economy before their valorization for other purposes, such as in aesthetics and religion. Reverend Father Mveng says regarding this subject:

Among all seashells used in Africa, the most important is the cowrie shell. This small white shell originated from the Indian Ocean (Maldives Islands) and spread from the eastern coasts of Africa to the entire continent. The cowrie shell was used almost everywhere as a currency (Mveng, 1980: 77).

Evoking the introduction of cowrie shells in Africa and highlighting their multiple functions in Africa in general and in Cameroon, Atoukam writes :

They were introduced in Africa by Arabs. They were in use in North Cameroon in the 19th century, as currency. Cowrie shells were firstly used as ornaments because of their religious value. These shells are reputed to play a role in fertility rituals, as their shape is associated with the female sex. In the long run, cowrie shells became more a working tool for "fetishists" than an element of beauty, although some African designers are trying to resurrect them to celebrate and revalue African culture. (Atoukam, 2015: 328).

The cowrie shell is used by leatherworkers not as an infatuation with pan-Africanism but more as a symbol of African cultures³⁵. Muslim informants are for the most part convinced

that cowrie shells contain mystical powers, hence their use by fetishists in Ngaoundéré for divination. Owning an object decorated with cowrie shells is to be protected from evil spirits. Cowrie shells are also used as ornaments on leather articles sold in Ngaoundéré.

II.1.4. Other ways of valorizing leather

The models produced underwent a clear evolution. By 1958, leather accessories were used among military, religious, security and clothing domains, as mentioned by (Wassouni, 2011: 151). Security and military fields, craftsmen made knives and swords, quivers, bow strings, shields and horse harnesses. From what the author said, mentioning Mohammadou, Les modèles fabriqués ont connu une nette évolution.

The Kanouri introduced cavalry and horsemanship in Adamawa armies. As a result, they were entrusted with the functions of technical advisors to the Fulani, as well as re-mounting and re-supplying various weapons (Mohammadou, 1996:107).

These leather cavalry outfits were not only valued by the Adamawa's armies, but also served as decorative items for Lamidats (Mouctar, 1982: 64). Horsemen's boots were also made of leather. The ropes and amulet wrappings (*laiyadji*) used to protect warriors and other followers were not to be outdone. These were usually attached to belts, called *gourouol* in Fulfulde, and tied around the hips. These elements of the army, although specific to the Far North great court, are also valuable in Adamawa, particularly in Ngaoundéré.

Religiously speaking, prayer rugs and Koran covers were also made from local leather and sought by scholars, as owning a leather objects, especially goatskin, was a sign of prestige (Wassouni, 2012: 153). The valorization of leather-made artifacts also reached the field of decoration.

II.1.5. Decorative Accessoires

Decorative accessories are used to embellish home interiors. Leather-made³⁶ articles used to decorate living rooms include poufs (photos 27 and 28) and small leather-covered guitars. The pouf is a round seat with no backrest or arms.

Picture No 27: Multicolored flowered Pouf

³⁵ Abdoul Razak, 40 years, shoemaker leatherworker, interviewed on March 26th at Ngaoundéré Handicraft Showcase.

³⁶ Holdon Sonia, 25 ans, adepte et cliente d'objets en cuir, entretien du 19 mars au petit marché de Ngaoundéré.



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Picture n° 28: Pouf in two colors with geometric patterns



Source : Atoukam, Ngaoundéré 2021

Poufs have a dual function: practical and decorative. As a seat, this type of chair needs to be upholstered, made entirely of fabric or tapestry, like the poufs sold in Ngaoundéré, to give them their true form. They feature a variety of mostly geometric and floral motifs, reflecting Arab-Muslim art, which, linked to Islam, minimizes anthropomorphic representations (Atoukam, 2005: 18). As shown in picture 27, this pouf is available in five colors (beige, red, black, brown and white). Geometric patterns surround the floral motif in the center of the pouf. The borders feature decorative ribbons. Picture 28 shows another pouf in a different color and pattern. Compared with picture 27, the footstool in picture 28 has two colors (beige and black) and only geometric patterns. These poufs are not stuffed.

Other items complete the list of leather accessories in Ngaoundéré, notably fans, also known as “chasse-mouches”. As the name suggests, fly repellents are essentially used to keep flies away. It's worth mentioning that this is a highly demanded accessory, especially during the mango-picking season in Ngaoundéré, when these insects proliferate. An informant³⁷ stated that these object are important in Garoua and Maroua, because they not only help in repelling flies but to refreshen oneself due to the high temperatures in these regions. If they are made from basketry or animal fur, the sleeves are mostly covered in leather. The presence of new artifacts on the market has led to the end of of some artifacts production

³⁷ Bassirou Saidou, 48, leather accessory salesman, interview on March 19, 2021 at the Ngaoundéré small market.

over time. What's more, people's enthusiasm for local artefacts is increasingly hindered by new, competitively-priced items from outside the region. In addition, the arrival of new middle-class buyers, notably public and private sector employees, who are much more interested in new offerings, has put a damper on this sector of activity, which is increasingly oriented towards interior decoration and linked to the development of these middle classes in Africa. But, what about marketing?

II.2. The sale of leather accessories and its limits

There are very few outlets selling leather accessories in Ngaoundéré, due to a number of obstacles still hampering the revitalization of this business sector.

II.2.1. Sellers and points of sale

As for the distribution of various leather accessories in Ngaoundéré, this is carried out, as in the case of leather, by people from the Far North of Cameroon. It is written on this subject :

Most of the young sellers in Garoua and Ngaoundéré are natives of Maroua. Having mastered all aspects of leather craftsmanship, they prefer to buy their supplies in Maroua and sell their products in these towns, where there is no leather industry, hence the existence of outlets, as prices are higher than in Maroua (Wassouni, 2011: 223)..

Indeed, the majority of leather accessory sellers are not only from the Far North, but are also Muslims. Paradoxically, most buyers are from southern Cameroon. These are the findings of field surveys.

As far as supplies are concerned, apart from a few outlets selling leather goods in Ngaoundéré, such as the small market, the passenger train station, the craft showcase, the shopping center and the craft center, leather goods can still be purchased elsewhere, notably from street vendors who criss-cross the city's arteries, carrying these goods on their bodies. Refreshment stands, including dance bars, are usually frequented by these vendors, who offer samaras and purses to customers for a fee.

Costs are usually within the reach of the average Cameroonian.³⁸, but a price comparison between the towns of Maroua and Ngaoundéré shows that prices are higher in Ngaoundéré, “because a pair of samara that can be bought for 700 FCFA in Maroua sells for 1,500, even 2,000 FCFA in Ngaoundéré” (Wassouni, 2011: 224). By 2021, The price of these samaras ranges from 2,500 to 3,000 FCFA. However, it all depends on the quality of the leather: the better the workmanship, the higher the price. Although these exchanges date back to the 2000s, they are still very selective in 2021, reserved for a certain category of people who are fond of objets d'art, which raises the question of their future.

II.2.2. Obstacles and challenges

The processing and development of leather accessories in Ngaoundéré is facing a number of difficulties that are preventing it from taking off. These are financial, material, technical and aesthetic.

In financial terms, craftsmen admit that they do not really benefit from the fruits of their labor, as the sale of leather accessories does

³⁸ Ekonda Doriane, 27, leather goods enthusiast and customer, interview on March 19, 2021 at the small market in Ngaoundéré.

not really feed the players in the sector. These professionals are calling on the State to help them organize and train. They are also asking for funding to enable them to innovate in terms of structures and work equipment. The Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of the Environment and the Ministry of Tourism are best placed to help improve this sector in Cameroon. Examples of countries that have succeeded in the crafts sector, such as South Africa, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Morocco, Tunisia and Kenya, could inspire government policies in charge of this sector.

On the material plan, this sector of activity encounters numerous difficulties linked to the shortage of raw materials, sometimes due to the poor quality of the leather and overbidding. In the opinion of professionals, the skins available take other routes, as collectors export them to Nigeria and even elsewhere in Italy, leaving craftsmen idle. The most popular material is skai or “fake leather”, imported from foreign countries, which means that foreign currency is leaving the country rather than coming in. We also realize that NOTACAM consumes a large quantity of skins, which are exploited more in Maroua than in Ngaoundéré. Wild animal skins are becoming increasingly scarce due to the control exercised by the Ministry of the Environment over Cameroon's wildlife sector. Finally, cultural mixing and population growth have led to the consumption of skins, which are increasingly sought-after.

On the technical front, craftsmen point out that working methods are struggling to innovate, while local products have to face up to international competition. Locally-produced products have remained unchanged in terms of both leather quality and models on the market. Indeed, the same cuts and materials known since colonial times are making a comeback in 2021. The reasons put forward are that processing techniques have remained rudimentary, and the slightest change in the craft sector in Cameroon via the opening of factories for the industrial manufacture of leather goods has not lasted long. The companies set up in Ngaoundéré, a town par excellence for cattle breeding, quickly closed their doors, hence the plea from players in the sector for the State to reorganize this sector of activity, which attracts unemployed young people. This initiative would go some way to solving the problem of unemployment.

In terms of aesthetics, buyers admit that it is important to improve local handicrafts, taking into account the climate, the living environment of the local population and even tourists. These consumers of handicrafts deplore the quality of accessories, which in their opinion sometimes leaves something to be desired, especially as regards the nauseating odors that emanate from

certain objects when they get wet. This makes it difficult to wear these items during the rainy season. They also recommend improving the soles of certain shoes, such as samaras, which are ill-suited to wet areas, as they deteriorate very quickly on contact with water and humidity. In this context, changes in clothing habits, however far-reaching, had to “respond to hygiene and health concerns, and be adapted more to activities and seasons than to the fashion of the day” (Roche, 1989).

On the other hand, some believe that it would be vital to innovate in terms of style, taking into account the evolution of time. This new adaptation is vital for the improvement and appeal of the product in the markets, for the economic revival in this sector of activity and beyond for the promotion of Cameroonian tourism, for as the author points out, most of the traditional arts or artistic achievements that attract the most tourists or any other foreigner are those that include an aesthetic aspect. It is through this data that Africa delivers its message to the world, a message of grandeur and peace (Essomba, 1985: 50).

CONCLUSION

At the end of this study, which focused on the processing and valorization of hides and skins, it became clear that this sector had been initiated in Ngaoundéré, which became a city in 1958. Actors in the industry are either natives of the Adamaoua region, or originate from other regions of Cameroon. While breeders, skimmers, dryers, tanners and craftsmen are mainly Fulani, some collectors, sellers and users are mostly foreigners. This division of labor is closely linked to the local culture: a herding society and a belief in amulets made from skins. It's clear that, despite being an area of high pastoral activity, Ngaoundéré has no hide processing plant, the only existing one (TANICAM) having closed its doors two years later after its creation in 1985. In spite of this situation, craftsmen continue to operate in the fields of shoemaking, leather goods and even basketry. A whole range of body beauty items designed to embellish and protect the body are produced by these craftsmen.

The artefacts show the creativity of craftsmen who, in 2021, are facing competition from a variety of low-cost products from European and, to a greater extent, Asian industries. Professionals in the craft sector are facing numerous difficulties of a financial, material and technical nature. This situation, far from promoting Cameroon's artistic and economic development, is also undermining its tourism boom. Hence the plea from craftsmen to the State for better organization and revitalization of the sector.

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1	Abdoul Razak	40	M	Shoemaker and leatherworker	March 26 at the vitrine artisanale
2	Ahmadou Oumarou	68	M	Craftsman	March 19 at Little Market
3	Al Hadj Souley	79	M	Tannery	March 17 in Bamyanga
4	Bassirou Saidou	48	M	Accessories seller	March 19 at Little Market
5	Djaratou	72	F	Tannery	March 17 in Bamyanga

6	Ekonda Doriane	27	F	Leather goods lover and customer	March 19 at Little Market
7	Higbeno Solange	31	F	Leather goods lover and customer	March 21, 2021 at Le Petit Marché
8	Holdon Sonia	25	F	Leather goods customer	March 19 at Little Market
9	Ibrahim Nassourou	60	M	Tannery	March 19 at Little Market
10	Idrissou Hamadou	50	M	Shoemaker and leatherworker	March 18, 2021 at the vitrine artisanale
11	Idrissou Lélé	50	M	Craftsman	March 18 at the vitrine artisanale
12	Ismaila Yaya	42	M	Craftsman	March 18 at the vitrine artisanale
13	Mbeng Anna	47	F	Restauratrice	March 25 at Carrefour Gabriel
14	Mohamadou Ynoussa	52	M	Butcher	March 23 at Dang's butcher shop
15	Moustapha Hamadou	45	M	Leather goods salesman	March 23 at the Petit Marché in Ngaoundéré
16	Mohammadou Aminou	33	M	Craftsman	March 18 at Joli-soir
17	Sali Abassi	68	M	Butcher	March 23, 2021 at the Manwi butcher shop
18	Sali Abassi	63	M	Skin purchaser	March 15, 2021 in Dang
19	Salifou	68	M	Skin purchaser	March 15, 2021 in Dang
20	Saliou	43	M	Photographer	March 26, 2021 on the university campus
21	Ousmanou Moussa	30	M	Accessories seller	March 21 at Dang market
22	Wang Mamouda	58	M	Chairman of the management committee of the <i>Centre la vitrine artisanale de Ngaoundéré</i>	March 20, 2021 at the vitrine artisanale
23	Waziri Ndongadaba	51	M	Artist painter	March 19, 2021 at the vitrine artisanale
24	Wemba Kameni	72	M	Former TANICAM technician	March 29, 2021 at Joli soir
25	Yaya Oumarou	57	M	Skin purchaser	March 15, 2021 in Dang
26	Youbi Dorothy	59	F	Shoemaker and leatherworker	march 19 talk at vitrine artisanale

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