

Socio-Cultural Environment, Conjugal Role Specification and Women's Entrepreneurial Performance in the Cameroonian Context

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to present the role of the socio-cultural environment through the ideology of the specification of conjugal roles, on the entrepreneurial performance of women in the Cameroonian context. By adopting a qualitative approach using multiple case studies, semi-structured interviews were carried out on a sample of ten (10) female entrepreneurs from the city of Douala. The thematic content analysis was carried out using the Nvivo 10 software. From this analysis, it mainly emerges that inequalities linked to gender, residential proximity between the entrepreneur and her in-laws constitute the factors that lead to a counter-performance of women in entrepreneurship. However, the involvement of the spouse in domestic tasks promotes the achievement of entrepreneurial objectives by women entrepreneurs.

KEYWORDS: *socio-cultural environment, women's entrepreneurship, Cameroonian context; conjugal role specification.*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *L25, L26.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship is an essential element in the fight against poverty and unemployment in developing countries (Brush et al., 2006). For many years, public policies have focused primarily on male entrepreneurship while ignoring the importance of businesses created and managed by women (Warnier, 1993). It should be noted that since the 1970s, female entrepreneurship has become a preoccupation in several sub-Saharan African countries, including Cameroon. This is reflected in the importance attached by the MINPESSA (Ministry of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, Social Economy, and Handicrafts) to businesses managed by women through programs such as the PDEFEC (Promotion and Development of Female Entrepreneurship in Cameroon). Moreover, since 2009, the International Labour Office (ILO) has considered these businesses to be the strategic pillar of private sector development in Cameroon. The question of performance concerns both men's and women's companies. The literature also reveals a debate on the performance of businesses set up and managed by women. Generally speaking, economic theory predicts underperformance for economic structures managed by these female entrepreneurs, in contrast to those managed by their male counterparts (McMahon, 2005; Raoutbi and Hernandez, 2017). Zeytinoglu and Cooke (2005) believe that the disparity between the performances of male- and female-owned businesses is sector-specific. Other factors, including environmental, economic, demographic, and legal factors, as well as the personal characteristics of the female entrepreneur, are cited in the literature (Boukar and Soukiwai, 2015; Meunier, 2007) to explain the performance or underperformance of women-owned businesses. However, these

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studies do not take into account the role of the socio-cultural environment in the management of these businesses.

The African context in general, and Cameroon in particular, is marked on the one hand by a strong imbrication between the business leader and his or her cultural environment, and on the other by the existence of a strong differentiation of roles between men and women in society. The role of this cultural environment in the performance of women's businesses cannot be ignored. Indeed, the social transformations that are increasingly taking place and tend to reduce the difficulties encountered by women in entrepreneurship are coming up against socio-cultural barriers in African society in general and in Cameroon in particular (Etoga, 2013). On this subject, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) recalled in 2010 that Cameroon is among the 15 countries in the world with the highest indices of gender inequality. In addition, this institution points out that high gender inequality inevitably leads to disparities in the human development of the countries concerned, with adverse consequences for the creation and management of businesses by women. Yet, since 2004, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has been pointing out that the elimination of these cultural constraints is likely to enable women to perform better in their entrepreneurial activities. This raises the issue of the role played by the socio-cultural environment, and in particular the ideological apprehensions of gender roles in African societies, on the performance of businesses set up and managed by women entrepreneurs. The main aim of this study is therefore to put into perspective the socio-cultural factors arising from different approaches to the specification of conjugal roles, which are likely to have an influence on the performance of businesses set up and managed by women in Cameroon. This study, through its results, will enrich the existing literature on the entrepreneurial performance of women, with particular emphasis on the role of the socio-cultural environment on this performance.

The remainder of this article is structured around a literature review (section 2), presenting women entrepreneurs' perceptions of the notion of performance, followed by the theoretical framework, in particular the ideology of role sharing and its various approaches. Next, the methodology (section 3), followed by the results (section 4), and finally discussion (section 5) will be presented before the conclusion (section 6).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Women's entrepreneurship is an important lever for reducing inequalities between men and women in Africa (Ntep and Zammar, 2020; Lofti, 2021; Tijari and Smouni, 2023). Many attempts have been made in the literature to define women's entrepreneurship, but the most accepted one is that of Belcourt et al. (1991). They define a female entrepreneur as a woman who seeks personal fulfilment, financial autonomy, and control over her life through the creation and management of her own business. However, the financial autonomy of this entrepreneur can only be effective if her entrepreneurial activity performs well. This performance depends on a number of factors, including those linked to the socio-cultural environment of the manager and her company. The literature addresses this issue by invoking the ideology of gender roles. In fact, it has a considerable impact on women's financial independence, and consequently, on the success of their economic and entrepreneurial activities (Sayer and Bianchi, 2000; Greenstein, 2000). In this section, we describe performance as perceived by women entrepreneurs before dwelling on the different approaches to role-sharing ideology.

2.1 The notion of performance in women's entrepreneurship

Performance remains a difficult notion to define in general, and particularly in the social sciences. Although several authors, such as Louitri and Bentaleb (2011), have conducted studies on this notion, Bourguignon (2000) noted that there is still no unanimity on its definition. This can be explained by the plurality of disciplinary fields in which the concept is used. In management sciences, ambiguity persists, and Tchankam (1998) points out that in this discipline, performance is generally equated with several other notions, such as effectiveness (Cameron, 1986), competitiveness (Lesca, 1984), and efficiency (Dewarrat, 1984). Others equate performance with productivity and output (Katzell et al., 1975). In this polysemy of the notion of performance, one of the most widely used definitions in management is that of Bourguignon (2000), who considers it to be “*the achievement of organisational objectives, whatever the nature and variety of these objectives. This achievement can be understood in the strict sense (results, outcome) or in the broad sense of the process leading to the result (action)*”. In practice, however, the concept remains highly ambiguous, and its meaning depends not only on the user, but also on contextual variables. This leads Salgado (2013) to point out that, in the absence of a consensus on the definition of performance, its content depends on the perception that actors have of it.

The work of Bourguignon (2000) shows that the performance of companies, particularly small ones, depends on the objectives and expectations of the promoter. Thus, the motivations that prompted the decision to create a productive activity will be decisive in the choice of performance evaluation criteria at the right moment. In the same vein, Buttner and Moore (1997) show that performance has a personal dimension, particularly in the case of women entrepreneurs. For these authors, some entrepreneurs consider themselves to be successful when they are successful on a personal level, which is assessed according to the expectations and personal objectives set when the business was created. Others, on the other hand, regard results as the measure of performance, the latter being reflected in the company's growth (Menziez et al., 2004). In the Cameroonian context, performance is understood as the achievement of personal objectives that motivated the woman entrepreneur's decision to set up the business (satisfying the family's economic and financial needs, participation in social activities such as tontine contributions), which translates into success, as well as growth (increased sales and profits), as defined by Belinga and Mvogo (2021).

2.2 The ideology of gender role sharing

Gender can be defined as a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, whereas sex is a biological fact different from gender, which is a social construct variable and evolving (Guionnet, 2014). From this perspective, we can note that, first of all, there are irreducible and biologically given feminine and masculine natures that constitute the sexes from which gender relations are identified. Talking about the specification of marital roles means looking at the differences observed in the way men and women allocate their time within domestic and family activities. Indeed, at one extreme we can notice a division of tasks, with the women having their occupations and the husbands theirs (Lemennicier, 1980). On the other hand, the man and the woman as spouses generally share domestic tasks and are therefore interchangeable in the household, we talk of “equality of marital roles”. Between these two extremes, there are varying degrees of specification or sharing of marital roles within the couple. The ideology regarding the sharing of roles according to gender is therefore defined as the way in which a human being identifies in relation to their sex and the roles of each of the two sexes in the household (Minnotte et al., 2010). This role distinction has an impact on the couple's relationship, and in particular on the woman's economic independence (Sayer and Bianchi, 2000), but also on the role played by

the woman's partner in the wife's quest for financial independence (Mickelson et al., 2006). We briefly present the different approaches and their potential impact on the performance of women-led businesses.

a) The culturalism approach to role sharing

Like Hofstede (1994), there are several pioneers in the study of the role of culture in the sharing of tasks according to gender. In his work, he defines culture as a collective mental programming that differs from one sociological group to another. It presents itself at three levels, namely: the personal level, the collective level, and the universal level. According to this author, the collective level is acquired from the family, the clan, or the ethnic group, and consequently, each human being is characterised by a culture acquired from the group to which he belongs. The survey carried out by Hofstede (1994) makes it possible to classify 53 countries according to six cultural dimensions, namely, hierarchical distance, individualism/collectivism, control of uncertainty, temporal orientation, indulgence/severity, and finally masculinity/femininity.

This last dimension makes it possible to establish the difference between gender roles in the couple relationship and in society in general. According to this study, African societies make a strong distinction between gender roles. In these societies, production activities are the prerogative of men, while domestic tasks are reserved for women. As a result, entrepreneurial activity is reserved for men, and they are reluctant to support their wives' entrepreneurial activities in any way they can. In this sense, these cultural norms and values will have an influence on the performance of businesses created and run by women. Narch et al. (2016) confirm this logic by showing in their study that cultural norms advocating inequality between men and women in Ghana disadvantage female entrepreneurs' access to formal financing, thus hindering the achievement of the goals they set for their businesses. In view of the above, the performance of women-led businesses in Cameroon is strongly influenced by cultural norms that consider men to be the head of the family and the only ones entitled to carry out income-generating activities.

b) The role of the social environment on the specification of tasks in the couple

According to this approach, each individual conforms to the cultural and traditional requirements of his or her social and family environment only if he or she is exposed to the pressure that can be exerted by this environment (Bott, 1955). Indeed, the individual's immediate environment is one of the ways in which society exerts pressure on him or her. It is made up of personal relationships, friends, neighbours, and, above all, close relatives. This is why Bott (1955) asserts that *“the degree of segregation of conjugal roles varies directly with the closeness of the ties uniting the network of social and family relationships”*. In other words, the closer the couple is geographically to those with whom they have close ties (nuclear families), the greater the social pressure exerted by this immediate environment. As a result, the couple will tend to organise their daily lives, and in particular the division of roles within the couple, according to the values and socio-cultural norms of this environment. To illustrate his point, Bott (1955) takes the example of a young household living in the same town as their parents, who are strongly attached to the cultural norms of the group, including the division of conjugal roles according to sex. The author shows that the network of social relations in which both spouses have long invested emotionally prior to their union puts pressure on them to adopt the attitudes of the existing social group. On the other hand, if the young couple leaves their parents' place of residence, they automatically lose the *“relational capital accumulated”* before getting married. Social pressure will be less intense, and attitudes toward conjugal roles will be more egalitarian. African society in general, and Cameroonian

society in particular, is characterised by a strong attachment to gender roles (Hofstede, 1994), with families, and more specifically the male spouse's family (wife's in-laws), being empowered by the social group's cultural norms to ensure that the young couple respects the norms in force in traditional society. Thus, close proximity between the couple and their family members could influence spouses' attitudes toward household roles. And consequently, repercussions on female entrepreneurship and its performance can be envisaged.

c) The “dual career” family and the distribution of tasks in the household

A professional career is a means of fulfilment for both spouses (Rapoport and Rapoport, 1969). Thus, the couple's stability is achieved when the wife works and is able to satisfy her own economic needs through her activity. The time constraint then imposes the interchangeability of conjugal roles between the spouses. As a result, the performance of the wife's entrepreneurial activity would be a function of the time given to this activity, to the detriment of household chores. And in this sense, the interchangeability of roles would mean that the time given by the wife to her activity at the expense of domestic tasks would be compensated for by the male spouse in the performance of household tasks. If a couple's stability depends on the woman's ability to work and take care of herself, a fundamental question is: why don't all women work? To answer this question, the proponents of this approach believe that couples make a trade-off and a choice between the expected gains and the costs of such a choice. For example, a successful “dual-career” family must be able to cope with extra roles (especially for the husband, who in addition to his regal role must devote part of his time to household chores), conflicts with parents and the group to which they belong over values and social norms, and the divergence between roles hoped for and those actually fulfilled.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

This section presents the methodological approach, the sampling procedure for the final sample, and finally the data collection and analysis procedure.

3.1 The choice of the qualitative approach by multiple case studies

Given the specific nature of this research, characterised by a scarcity of literature on the subject, we have opted for a qualitative approach in line with the recommendations of Wacheux (1996). To this end, data collection is based on semi-structured interviews following the guidelines of Pellemans (1999). An interview guide developed for this purpose on the basis of the existing literature and the results of the exploratory survey was used to conduct and guide exchanges with interviewees. The three main themes of the interview guide are as follows:

- a) Female entrepreneurship as perceived by the entrepreneur's entourage (neighbours, family, in-laws, and financial backers)
- b) Relationships with in-laws and their influence on business management: the duty of submission to in-laws and its influence on achieving entrepreneurial goals, the role of proximity to in-laws on the fulfilment of the entrepreneur in her activity.
- c) The marital relationship and entrepreneurial success: The husband's perception of the sharing of roles according to sex, the latter's support in household chores and the entrepreneur's achievement of entrepreneurial objectives.

3.2 Sampling and sample characteristics

The sample for this study is non-probabilistic as recommended by Beau (1984) for qualitative research. It was selected using the reasoned choice method and is made up of ten (10) promoters of very small businesses (VSEs) from the city of Douala (the main economic

metropolis of Cameroon). The main reasons for choosing these cases are, among other things, accessibility to information and marital status (women living in a marital union), a question of better perceiving the role that the family circle is likely to play (step-in-law family), and the distribution of tasks in the household based on the performance of the entrepreneur. However, it should be noted that this sampling technique nevertheless has some drawbacks. Indeed, non-probability sampling does not offer the opportunity to determine the probability of each element of the population belonging to the final sample, which could affect the generalisation of the results. Since the elements are chosen arbitrarily, it is impossible to estimate the sampling variability or identify possible biases. Table 1 describes the final sample.

It appears from this table that the sample is made up of companies whose age varies between 05 and 15 years. These are therefore relatively young companies, and this youth constitutes one of the major characteristics of women's companies in Cameroon (ILO, 2009). They are made up entirely of VSEs (Very Small Enterprises) as defined by the Cameroonian law. This choice is justified by the fact that businesses managed by women are essentially small units. In fact, not having the financial means necessary to embark on major projects and being victims of credit rationing by donors, these women generally limit themselves to the creation of a small income-generating activity, according to the National Institute of Statistics (INS) in 2016. Furthermore, most of them carry out a commercial activity, which is the main activity carried out by women entrepreneurs in Cameroon (Gueye, 2019). In addition, the women entrepreneurs in the sample have been married for at least 7 years, and the majority reside in the same city as certain members of their in-laws.

3.3 Data collection and analysis

The interviews were carried out for some at the interviewee's home in the absence of children and spouses and in the place of the exercise of the activity for others. This was done with the aim of avoiding the influence of third parties on the interlocutor's speech. A tape recorder allowed us to make the recordings after receiving formal authorisation from each of the study participants. The duration of these interviews varies between 20 and 30 minutes, for a total duration of 243 minutes and 50 seconds. These interviews were carried out between December 1, 2023 and January 5, 2024 in the city of Douala in Cameroon. Although this period coincides with the festivities marking the end of the year in our context, we still managed to speak with the entrepreneurs even though most of them were overwhelmed by their activities. In addition, these entrepreneurs were recruited on the basis of the objectives of the study while also taking into account their current (or past) residential proximity, or not, with members of their in-laws. After each interview, the recording was transcribed over the next few days, before the next interview was carried out. Furthermore, codes ranging from "CASE 1" to "CASE 10" were assigned to each transcript in order to preserve the anonymity of the interlocutors. Regarding data analysis, the thematic content analysis method was retained and this analysis was carried out using the Nvivo 10 software. The thematic content analysis technique consists of a division, an assembly, and the structuring of corpora allowing the systematisation of data and the establishment of reliable conclusions from the analysis (Huberman and Miles, 2015). Thus, after the transcription of the verbatims, they were classified by code according to the interlocutors, and then thematic coding was carried out. Indeed, the corpus was already structured by themes, questions, and answers; the structuring by tags (Cabr , 2007) was done, and the questions were separated from the answers in each of the corpora. Then, open coding (Adreani and Conchon, 2005) made it possible to identify and order, based on the questions in the interview guide and the research themes, the speech of each of the people interviewed. Therefore, the different ideas were selected with more precision to achieve the results of this study.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

CASE	Sector of activity	Age of the entrepreneur (in years)	Duration of marital relationship	Age of company (in years)	Number of children	Spouse's activity at the start of the activity/today	Place of residence in relation to in-laws at the start of the activity/today	Duration of the interview
CASE 1	General trade	35	10	05	03	Teacher/Teacher	Same city/Different cities	20 min
CASE 2	Trade (wholesale/retail)	46	11	08	03	Private sector employee/resourceful	Same city/same town	28 min
CASE 3	Hair salon	38	8	06	02	Trader/Trader	Different Cities/Same City	25 min and 05 seconds
CASE 4	Crafts (Sewing salon)	45	15	12	02	Private sector employee /Private sector employee	At 20 Km from in-laws/ At 20 Km from in-laws	30 min
CASE 5	Small trade	48	20	15	04	International lawyer / International lawyer	Same city/Different cities	23 min and 15 seconds
CASE 6	Small store	39	20	15	03	Trader/Trader	Same concession since always	27 min and 2 seconds
CASE 7	General trade	40	20	10	02	Trader/Trader	Same city and same neighbourhood/different neighbourhoods	22 min and 22 seconds
CASE 8	Small store	41	19	09	04	Trader/Trader	At 32 Km from in-laws/ At 32 Km from in-laws	21 min and 02 seconds
CASE 9	Small store	42	10	09	03	Trader/Trader	Same city/Different cities	23 min
CASE 10	Hair salon	37	7	05	01	Trader/Trader	Different Cities/Same City	24 min and 04 seconds

Source: authors

4. RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

Analysis of the interviewees' discourse highlights three main factors influencing the performance of female VSEs as perceived by female entrepreneurs. They include the woman's position relative to the man in society, the degree of proximity between the couple's place of residence and that of their in-laws, and finally, the involvement of the entrepreneur's spouse in household chores.

Indeed, according to 50% of the members of our study sample, the position of "being inferior" to men attributed to women in African societies in general negatively influences the performance of women entrepreneurs in the Cameroonian context. For the latter, this inequality maintained by cultural norms accentuates discrimination in access to formal financing, resulting in underperformance in terms of financing the growth of small production units owned by these women. As one respondent (CASE 2) put it, *"My business can't grow because when I apply for a microfinance loan to increase my capital, I'm clearly told that I'm a woman...We're not sure that as a woman I'm going to do as well in business as a man"*. Furthermore, women's position in the household does not give them the same access to family assets as their spouses, and under these conditions, they are unable to present the guarantees required by lenders when applying for credit. This is what we learn from the previous speaker, who hammered it home (with a smile): *"The bank always asks for guarantees...what can I do when all the assets are in my husband's name?... It's blocking the development of my business"*.

In addition to this first factor, the second that has a definite impact on the performance of VSEs managed by women in Cameroon is the proximity between the couple's place of establishment and that of the entrepreneur's in-laws, on the one hand, and the couple's cohabitation with members of these in-laws, on the other. Indeed, the pressure exerted by people with close ties to their spouses forces the couple to conform to the social norms of the group to which they belong, which in some cases is a source of underperformance for women entrepreneurs. This point was made by all the participants in the study, as one respondent (CASE 5) put it: *"When I was still living in the same town as my sisters-in-law, it was very complicated to blossom in my small business, because they would turn up at all hours to remind me that a woman should look after her home instead of looking for money...it really put me under pressure, and I didn't invest myself fully in my business.... Today, we've moved to a new town and I'm freer to run my business...I've already managed to make my two tontines thanks to my small business..."* Furthermore, the housewife is considered by her in-laws as a kind of "workforce" at their disposal. Under these conditions, when a woman is geographically close to her in-laws, even if she is an entrepreneur, she is obliged to respond to their requests, sometimes to the detriment of her income-generating activity, all of which encourages underperformance. On this subject, one correspondent (CASE 4) declares: *"I live just a few kilometers from my in-laws, and whenever I have to cook, for example, on a happy or unhappy occasion, my mother-in-law calls me directly, as I'm next door...and I'm obliged to sacrifice that day...it's a loss of earnings, but alas..."*. This position is echoed by a respondent (CASE 6) who points out that: *"I live in the same concession with my mother-in-law, and I'm obliged to devote a lot of time to her numerous requests. If I was far away from her, this wouldn't have to be the case, and all this time I would have devoted myself to developing my business... because of this, I can't make ends meet"*.

Finally, seven (7) out of ten (10) women feel that performance or the achievement of objectives depends on the willingness of the husband to assist his wife in household chores.

This is the main point made by one of the interviewees (CASE 7), who said: *“My husband and I are shopkeepers, so we go out together in the morning and come home together in the evening. Once we're home, while I'm in the kitchen, he looks after the children...If I had to do all these tasks without his support, my business would take a serious hit, because the time devoted to it would not have been sufficient because of the housework...”* More so, in addition to the husband's willingness, he must have the time to take on these new duties in the household if his impact is to be perceptible on the wife's economic success. Thus, two of our correspondents (CASE 2 and CASE 5) declare respectively: *“My husband used to work for a company and was never available...unfortunately he lost his job which gave him a bit of time and since then I've been able to achieve my economic goals a little more because I spend more time on my business while he helps me look after the children at home...”*, *“My husband is always away on business and at home I'm alone to do everything (looking after the children, cleaning...), that's why my business isn't getting ahead...I'm always looking after the children, cleaning...”*, which is why my business isn't progressing...I don't devote the necessary time to it”. The summary of these results is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Summary of results

Themes	Numbers	Percentage	Illustrative remarks
Gender inequalities	05 CASES	50%	“The bank always asks for guarantees...what can I do when all the assets are in my husband's name? ... it's blocking the development of my business”. (CASE 2)
Residential proximity between the entrepreneur and her in-laws	09 CASES	90%	“I live in the same compound with my mother-in-law, and I am obliged to devote a lot of time to her multiple requests, if I were far from her this would not have been the case, and all this time I will have been devoted to the development of my business... because of this, I am unable to make ends meet” (CASE 6)
			“I live just a few kilometres from my in-laws and as soon as I have to cook for example on a happy or unhappy occasion, my mother-in-law calls me directly as I am nearby...and I am obliged to sacrifice this day...it's a loss of earnings but alas...” (CASE 4)
Spouse's involvement in domestic tasks	07 CASES	70%	“My husband is always on business trips and at home I am alone doing everything (taking care of the children, cleaning, etc.), that is why my business is not progressing...I do not devote the necessary time to it”. (CASE 5)
			“Before, my husband worked in a company and was never available...unfortunately he lost his job which allowed him to have a little time and since then, I manage a little to reach my economic objectives because I devote more time to my business while he helps me take care of the children at home...” (CASE 2)

Source: Authors

This table presents the three main emerging themes for understanding the role of marital role specification on female entrepreneurial performance, the number of CASES who spoke in favour of each theme, and an illustrative statement in each case.

5. DISCUSSIONS

After analysing the results of our work, it emerges that according to 50% of the participants in the study, the inequalities between men and women validated and maintained by the cultural norms in force in African society in general and Cameroonian society in particular have an impact on women's entrepreneurial performance. To understand this result, we need to turn to the ideology of gender roles in society in general and households in particular (Minnotte et al., 2010). The traditional approach to this ideology developed by Hofstede (1994) suggests that African societies make a strong distinction between the social roles of men and women. Women are excluded from productive activities, and are expected to look after their households and raise their offspring. The position reserved for women by social norms exposes them to the risk of underperformance when they manage to engage in income-generating activities. Indeed, the position of “inferior being” compared to men constitutes a barrier to accessing the formal financial resources that should enable these female entrepreneurs to finance the growth of their structures. This situation is also at the root of the credit rationing suffered by women entrepreneurs (Coleman, 2000; Davidson et al., 2003), which impairs their performance. This result corroborates those of Narch et al. (2016), who show that in Ghana, the position reserved for women within the family does not give them access to family assets that can be used as collateral in the event of demands by lenders, thus hindering the development of women's entrepreneurial activity. It is therefore necessary for public authorities to focus on reducing the socio-cultural barriers that tend to consider women as “inferior” to men. This will help to reduce the difficulties encountered by women in the business world, particularly in accessing credit, and will contribute to increasing their entrepreneurial performance.

All the participants in the study were unanimous on the negative role played by the proximity between the entrepreneur and the members of her in-laws on the woman's entrepreneurial performance. Indeed, among the various approaches to role-sharing ideology is that of the social environment developed by Bott (1955). As mentioned above, this approach argues that the pressure on spouses in the reference group is stronger when the couple is geographically or physically close to people with whom they have very close bonds of affection (close relatives and families). In this case, these close relatives, who are responsible for ensuring that their children respect the social and cultural norms and values of the group to which they belong, will exert strong pressure on the children to conform to the rules in force in the society to which they belong.

As women's traditional roles are to look after their husbands, bring up their children, and carry out household chores, but also and above all to look after their in-laws, the closer the in-laws are to the entrepreneur, the greater the pressure to return her to her traditional role, as economic activity is not a priority. This residential proximity to close relatives is therefore a source of psychological disruption, instability in the management and monitoring of entrepreneurial activity, and, consequently, is likely to lead to underperformance in achieving the entrepreneurial objectives set. These results corroborate the work of Doubogon (2016) who, through statistics, demonstrates that in Benin, the success of female entrepreneurship is more visible in urban areas, far from traditional conceptions of women's place in society, than in rural areas where families still attached to old conceptions generally reside. Hence the need for ambitious women entrepreneurs to distance themselves from in-laws who remain attached to the traditional roles of women in society. This will ease the pressure on women entrepreneurs to perform their entrepreneurial activities, which is likely to have a positive impact on their performance.

Furthermore, these interviewees noted the importance of their spouses' involvement in domestic tasks for their entrepreneurial performance. Indeed, even if it is socially accepted that women's place in Africa is in the home and men's outside (Guétat-Bernard, 2011), Charmes (2005) has already shown that with the economic crisis of the 1980s, women's contribution to satisfying household economic needs has become more than a necessity, forcing more and more of them into entrepreneurship. As these wives now have a professional life on an equal footing with their husbands, this type of family is foreseen and referred to as the "dual-career family" by Rapoport and Rapoport (1969). These authors believe that a true balance between the professional careers of both spouses and family life requires a redefinition and redistribution of roles within the household. For the woman entrepreneur, this balance cannot be achieved without the achievement of her professional goals, so the authors recommend that the husband participate in the performance of domestic tasks, giving the woman entrepreneur sufficient time to follow up on her entrepreneurial activity and reap the rewards of success.

Thus, our results suggest that the spouse's involvement in domestic tasks leads to better performance on the part of the entrepreneur, as she has more time to devote to her income-generating activity. It is therefore imperative for entrepreneurial couples to review the division of domestic tasks so as to involve both spouses more in these tasks, which will give the entrepreneurial wife a better chance of achieving her entrepreneurial goals. However, this result runs counter to those of Herrera and Torelli (2013), who refer to the "double working day" in West Africa for professionally active women. Indeed, these authors consider that the time spent by women performing domestic chores does not alter their performance on the labour market, and consequently, the performance of part of the household chores by the spouse does not affect his wife's professional performance. Our results are also in line with those of Ezzedeen and Ritchey (2008), who consider that one of the best forms of spousal support for his wife's entrepreneurial activity is participation in domestic chores.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this research was to study the role of the socio-cultural environment, through the ideology of gender role-sharing, on women's entrepreneurial performance in the Cameroonian context. Adopting a qualitative case study approach, we conducted semi-structured interviews with ten (10) women entrepreneurs from the city of Douala, selected using the reasoned choice method. Thematic discourse analysis was carried out using Nvivo 10 software. The main results of this work show that gender inequalities, observed in society and endorsed by socio-cultural norms and practices, negatively affect women's business performance. This position of "inferior being" attributed to women in society limits their access to financial resources capable of financing the growth of their businesses, and consequently impairs the latter's performance. With this in mind, it is vital for public authorities to work on reducing cultural barriers that tend to consider women as inferior to men, which will help improve women's business performance. Secondly, we note that the proximity of the entrepreneur's place of business to members of her in-laws has a negative impact on women's entrepreneurial performance. Indeed, as women's traditional roles are to look after domestic chores in the home and with their in-laws, the closer the in-laws are to the entrepreneur, the greater the pressure to return her to her traditional role, as economic activity is not a priority. This proximity to close relatives is therefore a source of instability in the management and monitoring of entrepreneurial activity, and therefore likely to generate counter-performance in the achievement of entrepreneurial objectives. Hence the need for ambitious women entrepreneurs to minimise their residential proximity to their in-laws, in order to carry out

their entrepreneurial activities with greater serenity. Finally, our results suggest that the spouse's involvement in domestic chores positively affects the woman's entrepreneurial performance. Thus, by being constantly involved in these tasks, the husband lightens the workload of his partner, who now has an additional time slot to monitor her business, thus promoting success. The main limitations of this study lie in the sampling method (non-probabilistic), but also in the limitation of the study field to the Cameroonian context, all of which may hinder the generalisation of the results obtained. However, this paves the way for future research, which could consider a generalisation of the results of this study using quantitative methods, or a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. In addition, similar studies could be carried out in other socio-cultural contexts outside Cameroon, and comparisons between different contexts would further enrich the scientific literature on the role of the socio-cultural environment on the performance of women's businesses.

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