Trade and Traders. The Making of the Cattle Market in Benin
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This chapter shows that the cattle traders in Benin have followed a variety of 'itineraries' to fulfil the requirements that condition entry into the cattle trade. These itineraries will be labelled 'entry modes'. The analysis of entry modes at the individual level and at that of groups of traders marks a break with preceding chapters which focused on the structural level of the trade and the trade setting. In fact, the following chapters will specifically emphasise the personal characteristics of cattle traders and assess the extent to which these features influence their decisions and strategies with respect to the organisation of their trade activities. The impact of these strategies on patterns of cattle trade will be the subject of Chapter 8 which will demonstrate how cattle traders have strategically employed a variety of 'personal assets' in their responses to the nature of the cattle trade. Prior to this, Chapter 7 will address the issue of accumulation paths of individual cattle traders. It examines in detail the meaning of wealth as well as the determinants of success (accumulation) and failure (loss) in their careers.

The present chapter analyses the entry modes into the cattle trade of individual traders. In doing so, it addresses a particularly relevant issue since the previous part of the book has shown that, despite the gradually increasing number of traders and the gradually diminishing entry barriers, specific requirements continue to condition access to the profession of cattle trader. These requirements will be briefly summarised in Section 6.1. Following this, Section 6.2 distinguishes between main entry modes which respectively underline the role of kinship, apprenticeships and petty trading.

6.1 Requirements for involvement in the cattle trade

Any individual trader, irrespective of the size of his initial transactions, has to meet a series of specific requirements in order to be able to start a cattle-trade business on his own. These requirements are closely related to the value of the product involved as well as to other market features such as the absence of price and product standards, the omnipresence of credit sales and the mode of transportation (cf. Chapter 5). In short, these conditions necessitate a basic combination of money, relationships and skills with none of them alone being a sufficient condition for participation in the cattle trade. To be more precise, the
needs of a starting trader are an economic capital, social capital and knowledge, specifically geared towards the trade in cattle. The background to the concepts of economic and social capital was examined in detail in a broader framework of West African traders in Section 2.1. Specific attention was given to the notion of social capital, of which the most concrete representation was found to be the trade network. Section 2.1 also elaborated upon symbolic capital which represents a trader’s investments through which he acquires status and prestige. However, it appeared that symbolic capital particularly pertains to established traders and does not correspond to a factor that conditions an entry to the trade. Instead, an additional form of capital will be put forward which is indispensable to traders when access to trade is concerned. This is the possession of specific skills to be dealt with under the heading of ‘knowledge capital’. We will, however, set out by discussing the role of economic capital.

**Economic capital**

A minimum working capital is an essential prerequisite since the majority of cattle are purchased on a cash basis. Depending on the breed, the type and the quality of animal sought, a minimum of around 20,000 - 30,000 CFA francs is required, with amounts going up to 150,000 - 200,000 francs needed for the purchase of a well-fattened mature bull (cf. Section 5.2). Cash purchases are common at all cattle markets situated in livestock production zones throughout West Africa. In the previous chapter, it was explained that credit is used almost exclusively at coastal markets, where traders typically grant credit to butchers. In northern Benin, cash sales are common at formal as well as at informal markets. Credit transactions only occur sporadically, when the trader and the pastoralist have a long-standing relationship or when the trader has a good reputation for clearing his debts on-time.

Although bank credits for the purchase of cattle are somewhat more common in other parts of West Africa, they are only occasionally granted in Benin.¹ The conditions imposed by the only bank which has offices in the rural areas of the northern provinces, the Caisse Locale de Crédit Agricole Mutuelle (CLCAM), are not geared towards the needs of individual traders. CLCAM essentially serves farmers’ co-operatives and its requirements regarding collateral, membership as well as the maximum credit terms offered to individuals are difficult for cattle traders to meet. Thus, the cattle trade is usually financed through private sources. It should be noted, however, that the initial working capital for a starting trader can possibly consist of property, i.e. cattle. In this case, the owner of a cattle herd may start trading by just taking one or more animals from his herd.

**Social capital**

In Section 2.2, the notion of social capital was discussed in relation to its most prominent feature, i.e. the trade network. Most traders build up a trade network only after being involved in the trade for a long period of time. The organisation and function of trade networks of established cattle traders will be dealt with in Section 8.1. The social capital of a starting cattle trader should consist of a minimum number of contacts who will facilitate his initial cattle transactions. In the past, these contacts were crucial for the purchase of cattle since few formal markets existed. A ‘file’ of potential suppliers was a valuable asset for many traders, for whom the 'confidence' relationship with a particular farmer or

¹ Even then, only the wealthiest and most influential traders are capable of obtaining a bank loan because they own real-estate which can serve as collateral.
pastoralist exceeded that of cattle exchange alone. Furthermore, a beneficial purchase could depend on communication. Receiving the right information at the right moment could direct the trader to a pastoral village or to a farm where cattle were for sale. Today, the increase in the number of formal markets has reduced reliance on these contacts (cf. Section 8.2). Yet, the occasional profitable transaction with a related pastoralist or farmer remains significant, especially for a starting trader. An incidental high profit might bring him above a certain threshold.

Nowadays, ample opportunities exist for starting traders to perform their business at a local level, not least because it does not necessarily require an extensive network of social relationships. A contrasting picture emerges for the long-distance trade towards coastal markets. Following our discussion on the function of trade diaspora (cf. Section 2.1), it was observed that geographically dispersed trade contacts are deeply rooted in the long-distance cattle trade. Landlord-middlemen provide facilities such as food and lodging for itinerant traders, at far-away coastal markets. Furthermore, they also provide sales contacts (butchers) from whom they eventually collect outstanding debts. Selling an animal without the intervention of a landlord-middleman is still inconceivable on most terminal markets on the West African coast. It is therefore imperative that traders have a landlord whom they can contact upon arrival. Relations are equally important with regard to other features of long-distance cattle trading. In the first place, this relates to the number of animals which is usually trekked together. A typical herd, either on the hoof or per truck, consists of around 20 to 30 animals. Second, the transportation of cattle to (cross-border) coastal destinations necessitates the hiring of a truck or the hiring of 2 or 3 specialised cattle herders. The size of the herd and the hiring of trucks and herders obviously exceed the financial capacity of a starting trader, who therefore has to rely upon his relations with bigger traders (and their networks) for conveying his animal(s) to a distant destination.

Knowledge capital

Traders often stress the importance of skills by stating that one should know ‘.. les rouages du métier ..’, i.e. the ins and outs of the profession. For instance, the traditional system of purchases and sales of cattle poses problems for outsiders. In spite of the efforts of governments and donors to introduce a weight-and-grade system, purchases and sales in West Africa are customarily based on ‘eye judgements’ of the relationship between the quality and the proposed price. The situation in Benin is no exception. Without any official interference in grading and weighing, the trader proposes a price entirely based on his personal assessment of the quality of the animal, his knowledge of prevailing price levels and his bargaining experience. Subsequently, the trader’s bid is subject to lengthy bargaining with the owner of the animal. This implies at least some experience in valuing the crucial qualities of an animal (weight/price relation, meat quality, draught power quality etc.) and in assessing prevailing price levels elsewhere, the sales price at coastal markets in particular.

Some accumulated purchase and sales experience is not the only skill required. Knowledge of market places, cattle trek routes and official regulations is equally important, particularly in the case of exports. For instance, when traders fraudulently export their cattle to Nigeria, this requires up-to-date information on the location of trekking routes where there is a reduced risk of encountering customs officials. Furthermore, at least some experience in ‘negotiating’ with officials is necessary to prevent excessive payment of illicit taxes or, at worse, the seizure of a cattle herd. The expertise of trade practices and in particular of illicitly exporting cattle is not always easily and quickly accumulated. It can
however be hired and this is what the majority of established traders do. In the case of exports to Nigeria, this involves engaging an experienced cattle herder, although the financial means to do so may be beyond the means of starting traders. Access to cattle herders or to established traders willing to co-operate in the export of a cattle herd means having the right contacts or relationships.

The paragraphs above have briefly summarised the basic requirements for participation in the cattle trade. The next section focuses on individual traders’ trajectories in obtaining this minimum amount of economic, social and knowledge capital, and it will become evident that from a requirement, these forms of capital can eventually be transformed into valuable assets when their accumulation has reached a particular level. For instance, while a minimum number of contacts with cattle herders is part of the social capital required for a starting trader, a trade network with multiple relationships in various areas is common for a 'successful' trader who uses it to further expand his business. As such, his social capital constitutes an important dimension of his wealth.

6.2 Entry modes into the cattle trade

To enter the cattle trade it is not imperative to fully master each of the above-mentioned conditions. Only experienced and well-established traders combine a strong financial position with a profound knowledge of trading practices and an extensive network of relationships. The objective of a starting trader is to obtain the precise cocktail of capital, skills and relationships needed in order to become involved in the market. How have these 'newcomers' succeeded in doing so? The present section distinguishes between the three modes of entering the cattle trade defined as (1) the kinship mode, (2) the apprenticeship mode, and (3) the self-made trader.

The kinship mode

Imorou Bani is a Djerma cattle trader who was born in the Banikoara region but who currently lives in Cotonou. He explains that the cattle trade has always been in his 'family's blood'. During the 1940s and 1950s, his father frequently travelled from northern Benin to Niger to exchange cotton for potash. Upon his return, he would exchange the potash for calves in the villages of Fulani pastoralists. After a while, the animals were sold in Nigeria and Togo where Imorou's father would follow El Hadj Oroou-Diri (Bariba), one of the first and most well-known traders of the Banikoara region. Having spent some years in Banikoara herding their father's cattle, Imorou and his elder brother soon started to follow him on these trips in order to master the profession. The cattle trade became a family business. After some time, the father entrusted his cattle to his sons who trekked them towards destinations like Kolokondé, Sokodé and later also Cotonou. Finally, the two sons took over all the financial responsibilities when their father decided to 'retire' in 1983. Since their father's death in 1993, Imorou and his brother have run the business they inherited and are attempting to introduce their children to the trade. 'Introducing' actually means identifying those sons who will be most capable of taking over the family cattle trade. According to Imorou, the cattle trade 'is a gift of God' and one can easily recognise a child who is gifted commercially.
The example of Imorou Bani illustrates a 'family enterprise'. Not only does the family encompass three generations of cattle traders, the trade is also carried out in close cooperation between family members. The working capital is collectively managed as are the practical activities inherent to the trade. Clearly, for Imorou Bani, the family enterprise facilitated his entry into the cattle trade.

Here, we will address the role of kinship members in fulfilling the requirements for starting cattle traders. The occupations of family members and the way in which these occupations have favoured (or not) our respondents' involvement in the cattle trade are considered. Of course, the case of Imorou Bani may be exceptional, and less pronounced contributions from kinship members may exist as well. The final part of this section will address the issues of inheritance and succession in order to assess the ways economic, social and knowledge capital can be transferred from one generation to the next.

The occupations of family members

In view of the relatively 'short' history of the cattle trade which expanded only from the 1930s and 1940s onwards, family enterprises generally comprise no more than two generations of traders. Accordingly, among the traders who participated in the interviews only three had grandfathers who engaged in some kind of commercial activity, the trade in kola nuts and potash in particular. In addition to the relatively late expansion of the cattle trade, it has already been shown that trade had been a 'neglected' activity among the local Bariba and Fulani for a long time. Given this general reluctance, relatively high participation in trade activities was found for the generation of fathers of present-day cattle traders: they have certainly to be counted among northern Benin's 'trade pioneers' of the first half of the century. In fact, a genealogical analysis of 39 traders showed that more than half of the traders had a father with experience in trade. Experience in the trade of cattle, sheep or goats dominated (16 out of 39 traders). Furthermore, an equal number of traders either had a maternal or paternal uncle involved in some kind of commercial activity. Again, trade in livestock (13 out of 39) occurred far more often than that in other commodities. Given the relatively low number of traders until the 1960s, we can thus conclude that the number of father-traders or uncle-traders is fairly high among today's cattle traders, a situation which apparently points to the importance of benefiting from the capital, relationships and skills of family members. Yet, it does not necessarily imply that kinship members always work in close co-operation as we saw in the case of Imorou Bani. For instance, when some of today's traders started their careers, their fathers had already retired from active trading. A final remark concerns the observation that the number of fathers involved in the cattle trade, or in the trade of sheep and goats, was higher among the non-Fulani groups such as the Bariba, the Gando and the Djerma traders in the sample. A smaller number of local Fulani had a father or uncle in the livestock trade before 1970. This observation can be attributed to the relatively late entry into the cattle trade of the local Fulani as a group (cf. Section 4.3). With respect to the foreign Fulani from Niger, trader antecedents were more common.

Within our group of 39 traders, 14 had neither their father nor any uncle involved in commercial activities. For these traders, the decision to enter the cattle trade often constituted a break with the family tradition of farming or pastoralism. In contrast, all

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2 Section 1.4 introduced the composition of the group of traders with whom interviews were held.

3 Uncles includes brothers of the biological father and mother as well as half-brothers.
other traders had 'commercial antecedents' within their families. However, the extent to which these starting traders were 'assisted' by kinship members in obtaining the required amounts of economic, social and knowledge capital is difficult to assess. Whereas some traders explained that they were not involved in a 'family business' and started trade independently, others were encouraged by their father or an uncle at a very young age. For these traders, 'trade constituted a heritage' since they were initiated through kinship contacts and made up part of the family business. Requirements concerning capital, skills and relationships were all dealt with from within the family, since the young traders received an education in trade by 'following' their father or uncle. As the case of Imorou Bani demonstrated, capital was provided by family members and only after the death of 'retirement' of the father is financial responsibility transferred to the son who is thought ready to take over the business. Within the group of traders, 7 traders (all Bariba) were found to be part of such an integrated family enterprise. The remaining traders with commercial antecedents benefited at a lesser degree or not at all from kinship members. For instance, while some inherited part of the working capital from their father's cattle or kola trade, others only benefited from some of their father's relationships or from the trade knowledge he could pass on to them.

In addition to kinship antecedents in trade, a few remarks have to be made concerning the role of family members who occupied positions as butchers, marabouts or princes. These positions significantly contributed to the accumulation of economic, social and knowledge capital among starting traders.

The activities of butchers and cattle traders have always been interwoven. In the past, many butchers' families used to operate as vertically integrated enterprises, covering all stages of the marketing channel from the purchase of the animals to the retailing of the meat. Butchers from coastal agglomerations even went northwards in search of cattle. Today, however, the majority of butchers established in large towns are specialists and exclusively involved in the slaughter and/or retail of cattle and meat. Only in rural areas such as northern Benin do butchers still set out for markets and pastoralist villages to buy their animals. With the expansion of the market system and transport opportunities, butchers' provisions have become more stable over the years. Provision used to be a difficult task and a network of family members and apprentices was needed to ensure regular visits to pastoralist villages. Experience with cattle purchases and market visits as well as contacts among pastoralists facilitated entry into the cattle trade of some members of these butchers' families. In fact, 4 out of the 14 Bariba traders in the sample were born into a butchers' family. The sample further included 1 Haoussa trader with a butcher's background. The fathers of these traders had started to introduce them to the trade at an early age. Although activities related to slaughtering and retailing used to be of prime importance, one or more of them would already specialise in the purchase of animals. Thus, they followed their father or other related butchers on their trips to cattle markets and, more often, pastoralist villages, establishing relationships with pastoralists and learning about the cost effectiveness of buying animals at specific prices. While some would take over their father's butchery, others would settle independently with the benefit of the

4 In general, the Fulani prefer not to slaughter cattle themselves. Like the specific caste of traders (the Djawando), some Fulani groups in West Africa have had particular castes who, among other things, slaughtered cattle (Dupire 1962, 339). In Benin, the Gando (the former slaves of the Fulani) used to perform a variety of tasks for the Fulani when in captivity, including the slaughter of cattle.
capital and knowledge they had gained within the family. Several of today's traders who started their careers as a butcher have gradually specialised in trading activities. Notwithstanding this, butchery usually continues to play an important role in their life. They still possess a butcher's license which bears their name, and either their sons or apprentices will carry out everyday work.

In the past as well as nowadays, a close relationship has existed between trade and marabouts (Islamic scholars or healers). This was reflected within our sample of the cattle traders, several of whom had a kinship member who occupied a position as a marabout or Alfa (the Djerma term which is often used). Among the Moslem population, a marabout has always enjoyed considerable prestige and reputation having knowledge of magic formulas, Koranic verses and numerology which allow him to 'predict' the future, heal diseases and manipulate fortunes. Moreover, some traders have claimed that knowledge of the Koran facilitates the discovery of 'valuable trade secrets'. In other words, a marabout possesses substantial social capital and is trusted and respected by others. His prestigious position used to be typically accompanied by relatively high wealth reflected, for instance, in the ownership of a cattle herd. The latter is not surprising since many Fulani who consulted a marabout usually paid in the form of cattle. Part of this wealth could be invested in commercial activities such as trade in cattle. Given the proliferation in the number of marabouts today, this relationship is now somewhat less obvious.

A similar position used to be occupied by members of the royal Bariba families, the princes. The concomitant social capital and wealth facilitated the involvement of some members of these families in commercial activities such as the trade in cattle.

The role of kinship members who occupied positions as butchers, marabouts and princes had a stronger impact in the past when the number of traders was low. Nowadays, the cattle trade has become increasingly transparent and economic, social and knowledge capital have become available to a larger group and are no more confined to a small group of 'trade pioneers' on the one hand, or members of the elite (such as princes or marabouts) on the other.

**Inheritance and succession**

A substantial number of today's cattle traders had a family member involved in a commercial activity or in another occupation that could potentially favour the accumulation of economic, social and/or knowledge capital necessary for trading cattle. Kinship members can benefit from the social and knowledge capital of their fathers or uncles through the mere reputation of the family name (social capital), the observation of trading practices, or through listening to experiences related to them. The situation with regard to economic capital is somewhat more complex. Sometimes the trade activities of family members are strictly separate whereas on other occasions they are closely related as is shown in the case of Imorou Bani, his brother and their father.

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5 The first marabouts in present-day northern Benin were mainly Haoussa or Djerma and they used to be itinerant Islamic scholars who accompanied trade caravans and offered their services to the established Bariba elite of warriors and princes.

6 Some informants have explained the propensity of marabouts to assist one or more of their family members to start in the cattle trade, by pointing at the prevalent attitudes towards the cattle trade until the 1970s. According to them, the cattle trade was seen as 'an adventure' and marabouts had always been considered as '.. hommes de l'aventure..' (men of adventure).
Given the number of fathers that were engaged in trade, the question has to be addressed as to how their business was continued and by whom. In Section 2.2, some remarks were made about the subject of inheritance and business succession in the Moslem-dominated trading communities in West Africa. We saw that although inheritance generally means the splitting up of wealth among the male heirs of the first generation (Forrest 1994), its practical application among traders reveals specific local interpretations. With respect to the role of inheritance for cattle traders in Benin, a distinction has to be made between the situation for Bariba and Fulani traders respectively. Among the former, we already noted a higher incidence of so-called family enterprises in which a cattle trade business is transferred from one generation to the next. The role of inheritance among Fulani traders is different, given the lower number of family enterprises. For the latter, the role of inheritance was found to be confined to transfers of cattle among kin, which accordingly provided the economic capital required for entering the cattle trade.

One of the important issues in the cattle trade business of most Bariba traders is the procedure of selecting the son who eventually will be their successor. Therefore, the relationship between a father and his son(s) is of crucial importance for the transfer of trade activities (Baier 1980, 175). Most traders prefer to pick one of their sons in an attempt to avoid the fragmentation of the business. In general, cattle traders were very concerned about this issue. The trade education of their sons starts at a very early age. From simple work such as herding cattle, they will be given increasing responsibilities often with the aim of ultimately selecting the one who will be capable of managing the cattle trade alone. This is not necessarily the first-born son. On the contrary, a grown-up first-born son is usually thought to have the family (managing the day-to-day household situation) and the farm (food production) as his prime responsibilities. Hence, trade is often considered a conflicting activity since it implies frequent absences from home. It is therefore typically one of the other sons who will take care of the cattle trade on behalf of the father. The mechanisms used by traders to attempt to identify the most commercially gifted among their sons constitute a crucial part of their trade education.

Selection mechanisms
The mechanisms which traders employ in the selection procedure range from simple to complex. Some of them just act like El Hadj Dogo who gave both his sons around $1,000,000 CFA francs to see how they would develop their own businesses, which would not necessarily involve cattle. For instance, his first-born son purchased a vehicle in order to earn money as a taxi driver. The second, however, invested in the cattle trade. In the end, neither succeeded and El Hadj Dogo excluded them from any further trade activity on his behalf. According to him, success in trade 'is a question of luck'. Others put in more effort and developed a system of checks and balances. El Hadj Abdulaye, for instance, has three grown-up sons and each of them has separately made trips to Cotonou to sell Abdulaye's cattle. Upon their return to the village, Abdulaye tried to receive information from other traders as well as from his landlord in Cotonou about their behaviour at the market. Another alternative is provided by El Hadj Mamadou who, after having agreed on a price with someone who wanted to sell him a bull, sent one of his sons to negotiate a price for the very same animal (the seller having been told to make it an extremely arduous negotiation). In general, all traders will bring their children to the market to let them observe the negotiation process. In addition, they all believe their children should start with trekking cattle to specific sales destinations to become acquainted with all the ins and outs of the cattle trade.
Having accompanied their father for some time, some may break away from the family business to start their own business, while others keep on working for their father until his death. In most Bariba cattle trading families, the father continues to assume a role as 'head of the enterprise' even after his retirement from active trading. This is reflected in the need for his sons to give a detailed account of all profits and expenses each time they return from a business trip. Decisions regarding the allocation of trade profits are usually made by the father. Remuneration for his sons possibly consists of a salary, which depends on the nature of the task carried out, or otherwise of financial assistance in expenses related, for instance, to agriculture (seeds, pesticides) or a marriage. With several accumulated salaries or with the revenues from their own cotton fields, sons may be able to purchase their own cattle which are traded together with the animals which belong collectively to the family enterprise. This implies that part of the profit is individualised within the larger whole of the family business. Of course, some might opt for a break with their father's business as a result of a conflict or because of dissatisfaction with the dominant role of the father. It was observed that following such a break, the son will often not proceed with his career in cattle trading and instead tempt his luck in another (trade) sector or simply in agriculture.

Upon a trader's death, the material value of his business (working capital and animals) will either be divided between the sons or kept within the family. However, all traders attempt to influence the way their trade will be continued after their death and, in order to safeguard the continuation of their business, some of them employ specific strategies to assure that the working capital will already have been transferred to one (or more) of their sons. Alternatively, the family may decide to prevent the fragmentation of the working capital. For instance, old Soumaila was a wealthy cattle trader who had five sons when he died. The youngest son, Abdulaye, had already been identified as the most talented trader and had been responsible for most of the cattle trade activities after the retirement of his father. After the funeral, the family decided not to divide up the business. Thus, the working capital and the cattle herd remained intact and Abdulaye used both for his cattle trading on behalf of the family. Over the years, some of the inheritance was given to family members who wanted to receive their own part. In the meantime, Abdulaye had been able to considerably expand business so that distributing the respective parts did not hurt his cattle trade. Some traders, finally, try to make sure that their sons each have an individual (working) capital at an early stage. One of them called this '"libéraliser les affaires de chaque enfant '" (releasing the affairs of each child). In this situation trade continues to be a 'family affair' and each son has to cater for part of the collective family needs. At the same time, commercial responsibilities are individualised and each son owns his own cattle. Although this 'premature distribution' of wealth excludes the remaining cousins, grandchildren and other remote male heirs from sharing in the full inheritance, excessive fragmentation of the business is prevented.

The notion of the family enterprise is rarely found in exactly the same configuration among Fulani traders. In fact, although kinship effectively contributes to facilitate a trader's first steps in trade, it does so in a different way. The majority of the Fulani who were part of the sample of traders, explained that they had been stimulated to engage in a trading activity by their fathers. Although some of their fathers traded cattle on a small

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7 It is also common practice to designate one or more cows to a son at the moment of his birth. This cow, as well as its offspring, belong specifically to that son who will have a small herd by the time he grows up (Dietvorst 1990).
scale, most of them just combined pastoralism with subsistence agriculture and refrained from trading themselves. The major droughts of the 1970s and 1980s and the accordingly difficult circumstances in northern Benin and also in Niger were the major reason for the Fulani to start trading. Often, a father would give one or two animals to his son who was then told to 'tempt his luck in trade' ("... tenter la chance..."). This practice can be considered as reflecting the changing attitudes towards trade among an increasing number of Fulani.\(^8\) It equally shows that the role of kinship is particularly one of transfer of economic capital, i.e. cattle.

The transfer of cattle in Fulani society is a well-documented phenomenon.\(^9\) From his birth onwards, a son gradually receives part of his father’s herd. In fact, some cattle might already be designated as his property at the moment of his birth. This system of pre-inheritance is accentuated at particular moments such as on the occasion of a marriage, when a son establishes his own household and becomes 'independent'. The importance of pre-inheritance is such that only a few animals are transferred after someone’s death since most will already have been distributed. Of course, the transfer of cattle in a pre-inheritance system has always existed, but in view of changing circumstances they have increasingly been used by some Fulani as a springboard to the cattle trade. The stimulating role of family members, specifically emphasised by the traders themselves, to 'tempt their luck' is of significance in this respect.

The remaining assets which consist of skill and relationships have to be found otherwise. Of course, most Fulani have experience as cattle herders, and some of them follow established Fulani, Haoussa or Djerma traders to the capital cities in the coastal areas. Relationships have to be established through friends or by just offering services to big traders, benefiting from trekking this trader’s herd so as to be able to earn one or two animals for oneself. The case of El Hadj Moyye provides a good illustration of how the above-mentioned aspects combine into a specific entry mode.

As a child, Moyye used to be the sheep and goat herder (berger de moutons) for his family. His parents’ cattle camp was situated in Niger, near the borders with Benin and Nigeria. In this border region, Moyye would not only seek water and pasture but he would also visit cattle markets where he observed trading practices and established useful contacts when he came to sell some old rams every now and then. He thus acquired indispensable experience in trade practices as well as trade contacts. When he finally obtained 2 bulls from his father’s herd, he engaged in his first cattle transaction at the end of the 1970s. He sold the bulls at the Gountchi border market in northern Nigeria where he knew one of the dillali. The transaction generated a substantial profit which enabled him to purchase more cattle and to extend his business rapidly in collaboration with his trader friends from Kamba (Nigeria).

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1 Traditionally, the preferred choice with regard to children is to give them tasks in pastoral activities or send them to a Koran school.

2 Among other publications, see Dupire (1962, 342-348); De Bruin & Van Dijk (1995, 315-328); Dietvorst (1990).
The apprenticeship mode

A possible way to gain the capital, knowledge and relationship requirements is by doing an apprenticeship under the guidance of an established trader. The relationship between a trader and his apprentice has traditionally contained elements of dependency. Apprentices typically do not receive a regular salary and have therefore to be distinguished from salaried workers. Instead, in exchange for 'protection', food, lodging and an education in the trade, the apprentice carries out various trade-related activities on behalf of the trader. The complex forms of monetary reward that do exist can usually be characterised as irregular and tend to confirm the dependency of the apprentice upon his trader/tutor. This has taken Agier (1983, 240) to designate an apprenticeship as the relationship between patron (trader) and client (apprentice).

In general, an apprenticeship is characterised by the duration of the relationship, the complexity and irregularity of rewards, the internship of the apprentice and the necessity for mutual trust. Not every trader is prepared to accept an apprentice, even though big traders, for reasons of prestige, may find it complicated to refuse accepting someone. The cattle traders in Benin claimed that they preferred taking apprentices whose parents they knew. Generally the elder family members propose someone of their kin to the trader for an apprenticeship. Although apprenticeships do generally not include kinship relations, some cattle traders referred to close family members as their apprentices. This often included cousins who were brought to the trader by their mothers with the specific aim of finding them an apprentice position in the cattle trade. These cases reflect the sometimes permeable boundary between entry into trade through apprenticeships or through kinship relations. In fact, some traders claim that becoming an apprentice means becoming the 'son' of the trader.

The most outstanding feature of apprenticeships among the cattle traders in Benin is the complexity of rewards. At the outset of the apprenticeship, the apprentice basically receives just food and lodging. In exchange, he has to perform basic activities such as the trekking and herding of cattle. Throughout the internship, though, the apprentice can expect financial assistance from his patron in the case of unforeseen expenses such as medical treatment and the like. Over the term of the apprenticeship the responsibilities of the apprentice typically evolve to include the purchase and sale of cattle or the collection of debts among butchers at coastal markets. This implies that the trader is confident enough to entrust his capital to the apprentice and a relationship of trust is instituted. At this stage, the remuneration will have come to comprise more than food and lodging alone. From conversations, it appeared that each trader finds his own means of rewarding his apprentice. In general, however, the reward is based upon the payment of a salary for particular activities. For instance, it is common practice among traders to pay their apprentices for the trekking of cattle to distant markets while no salary is paid for other tasks such as the herding of cattle awaiting transportation. The case of Bani Soumaila is illustrative of the way in which an apprenticeship can mature to include a financial reward:

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10 This practice was particularly common among the Bariba traders. In general, a Bariba child has strong ties with his maternal uncle.
The late Bani Soumaila (Fulani), who died in a car crash while returning from Nigeria in October 1996, started his career around 1980 when he met an established cattle trader in Gamia (northern Benin) and they agreed on an apprenticeship. For four years, Bani followed this trader to Parakou, Cotonou and Nigeria and he was able to observe the mechanisms of the cattle trade. At the start, he principally took care of the cattle trekking and herding. His patron provided him with food and lodging. After a few years, the patron occasionally entrusted his cattle to Bani for sale at the Nigerian market of Saki where he would be assisted by his patron’s landlord. Each time Bani trekked cattle to a specific destination, his patron would write down his salary in a notebook instead of paying it in cash. The accumulated salaries plus a bonus were paid out after four years when the apprenticeship came to an end. Subsequently, Bani returned to his village, invested part of his capital in the family herd and started trading activities on his own with the remaining sum. Bani’s main destination would remain the market of Saki where he had established a good relationship with his former patron’s landlord.

The case of Bani Soumaila is unusual in the sense that his salaries were written down and only paid at the end of the apprenticeship. The payment system thus confirmed the dependency relationship and entailed a significant risk for the apprentice if his patron experienced financial setbacks. Other cattle traders have organised different payment systems. Instead of paying a salary, they would entrust a certain number of cattle to their apprentice who was made responsible for the sale of the animals and could keep the profit for himself. According to the same principle, Boureima Dosso (a Fulani trader from Guéné) worked out a complex procedure of rewarding his apprentices. He had two apprentices who used to trek his cattle to Parakou as well as to Nigerian markets. At a given moment, Boureima paid their trekking salaries upon their return. On top of this, he added a small sum to allow for the purchase of a young bull. The apprentices then had to purchase a young bull, sell it and reimburse the sum provided by their patron. The sales destination was Ibadan (Nigeria) and the 2 apprentices sold their young bulls together with 18 of Boureima's cattle. They had made a small profit and received their salary plus a new loan from their patron with which they could purchase more cattle. Accordingly, several such 'cycles' would be completed and the amount Boureima had to add became smaller and smaller until the apprentices were capable of financing cattle purchases themselves.

The case studies make it clear that the payment of a salary and the assignment of an increasing number of trade responsibilities ultimately serve the purpose of enabling the apprentice to perform a cattle trade business on his own, i.e. to prepare his career as an 'independent' trader. It has equally been highlighted that the 'traders in education' accumulate a small social capital of some sales contacts and relationships with landlords at sales markets. When the patron-trader judges that the apprentice is ready to establish himself as an independent trader, he will 'liberate' him. Liberating an apprentice in the cattle trade is an event which is usually marked by an additional gesture from the trader. Bani Soumaila, for example, obtained a 'bonus' in the form of some additional working capital. The marriage of an apprentice is a typical occasion which can mark the end of an apprenticeship. This event symbolically represents a change of life in the sense that the apprentice will become 'physically' independent, i.e. living in his own house (cf. Agier 1983, 245). The patron-trader typically takes care of all expenses related to the marriage of his client.
The exact duration of an apprenticeship varies considerably from unsuccessful relationships lasting only a few months to sustained relationships which last for about 10 years. When an apprenticeship stretches over such a long period, its nature will usually change accordingly. The 'apprentice' will have come to own several cattle himself within his patron's herd. Moreover, he will possibly have established his own house, no longer depending on his patron for food and accommodation. Still, even for a 'liberated' apprentice an element of dependency will continue to characterise his relationship with his former patron. Even though the former apprentice is now capable of managing his own cattle trade, he remains indebted to his patron. This means, for example, that he will always be prepared to take care of cattle herding or trekking. At the same time, part of the relationship may have a commercial character and business information is exchanged and means of transport shared on the basis of proportional cost sharing. Nevertheless, an element of hierarchy will always remain (ibid.).

The preceding paragraphs have outlined the functioning, advantages and disadvantages of what could be labelled 'traditional apprenticeships'. In this guise, however, apprenticeships have become increasingly rare today. Even though the relationship between a cattle trader and his apprentice necessarily preserves an element of 'trust', it has become unmistakably more professional in other respects. This tendency towards 'professionalisation' is reflected in the modified nature of three basic characteristics of the apprenticeship: the payment system, the internship and the length of stay. First, the system of payment has become more formal and standardised. Instead of the various ingenious procedures used by traders to reward their apprentices, it is common practice today just to pay a fixed salary for each service rendered. Second, food and lodging no longer form a structural part of the apprenticeship and are usually provided on an occasional basis only, i.e. while carrying out trade-related activities. Finally, the average length of stay has generally shortened. Since payment is punctual and regular, cancelling the apprentice - patron relationship is much more easily decided upon by one or both parties.

The slow but gradual disappearance of traditional apprenticeships can be attributed to changes in the cattle trade on the one hand, and changes in the attitude of traders on the other. In the first place, as was already highlighted in previous chapters, the opportunities for starting traders have improved. The cattle trade has become more transparent and with a small working capital it is possible to carry out transactions at a local level. A lengthy, uncertain and arduous apprenticeship has therefore increasingly lost its attractiveness. Moreover, although there are many cases of successfully completed apprenticeships and subsequent careers as independent traders, numerous relationships between trader and apprentice have been interrupted prematurely or have ended unsuccessfully. Frequently, apprentices have been forced to try their luck elsewhere or were condemned to a marginal position in the cattle trade. Secondly, the cattle traders themselves claim to be more cautious when taking an apprentice. Many have had bad experiences in the past. These experiences involved the loss of cattle or capital entrusted to an apprentice, not only as a result of incompetence but also due to theft. This has made cattle traders increasingly reluctant to engage apprentices. Since the number of cattle herders with expertise on long-distance trekking itineraries has risen over the years, traders are more and more tempted to recruit from the large pool of occasional employees. Some prefer to occasionally employ a

11 In this respect, Grégoire (1986, 202) remarked that the exploitation of apprentices masks the illusion that, one day, they might become independent traders themselves.
salaried worker because it is much easier to end the relationship in the case of a conflict (cf. Lambert & Egg 1994, 251). Despite the reduction in the number of traditional apprenticeships, cattle traders persist in their attempts to maintain an element of trust in their relationships with salaried herders due to the sensitive nature of the tasks performed by the latter. However, instead of using apprentices, they use other means of ensuring the establishment of a trust association with a salaried worker (cf. Section 8.1).

The self-made trader

In addition to the kinship and apprenticeship options of entering the cattle trade, some of today's traders have followed other, self-initiated ways to establish themselves in the cattle trade business. The term self-made has been borrowed from Miaffo & Warnier (1993, 60) who employ it in their analysis of accumulation itineraries among the Bamileké in Cameroon. The following paragraphs describe some of the itineraries covered by cattle traders in Benin to independently fulfil the requirements outlined in Section 6.1. It will be shown that self-made traders have forced access into the cattle trade by carrying out petty trading activities or through their involvement in commercial agriculture.

Petty trading

Cattle transactions are capital intensive and few people possess the required financial means. This makes petty trading a logical first step towards the cattle business. A large variety of petty trading activities have been carried out by those traders who would later become cattle traders. Although some activities were very much related to the cattle trade, others were not. More importantly, the character of these activities has changed over time. Section 3.4 described how several of the Bariba cattle traders who operated in the 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s were engaged in the collection of traditional products such as kapok or onion leaves, some of which were sold to colonial trading firms. Further traditional forms of petty trading consisted of trade in kola nuts and potash from the forest and Sahelian zones respectively, as well as the trade in imported salt. As new opportunities in trade became available, the importance of these products gradually decreased at the expense of others. This is illustrated by some of today's Fulani and Djerma cattle traders who were engaged in various kinds of petty trading during the 1970s and 1980s. Almost without exception the then young traders travelled through numerous West African countries always à la recherche d'argent (in search of money) as they call it. For some of these traders, this just constituted a phase in their life which they typically describe as être en aventure (being an adventurer). They cleverly exploited networks of related acquaintances who had already established themselves in coastal West African towns such as Abidjan, Accra, Lomé or Lagos. Here, the 'stranger traders' engaged in the selling of all kinds of items from second-hand cloths {friperie) to stereo equipment. In addition to trade, several earned a small income as watchmen or they herded the cattle of absentee, town-based herd owners. Hence, a small working capital was built up which would eventually constitute the basis of their cattle trade. The step-by-step accumulation process which characterises petty trading

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12 It was explained in Section 4.2 that several immigrant Fulani from Niger started to hire themselves out as contract herders in northern Benin upon their arrival there. They grazed the cattle of farmers or cattle owners from the towns. This provided them with a small capital with which some of them entered the trade in cattle.
equally serves to progressively establish contacts with other traders (social capital) and helps in getting to know the ins and outs of the trade in general. In the case of Fulani traders, their knowledge capital was completed by experiences in cattle trekking or contract herding. In fact, many Fulani already possess such experience which they obtain by herding their own cattle, those of their families or of absentee owners. Section 8.3 shows that these particular experiences have given them a head start in specific market segments.

Other forms of petty trading are more closely linked to the trade in cattle. In this respect, the trade in poultry, sheep and goats has to be mentioned in particular. In the gradual process towards involvement in cattle trade, some traders have initially focused on these sectors of the livestock trade for which a smaller amount of working capital was required. Nevertheless, even though useful experience was obtained in fields such as animal health, trekking itineraries and price bargaining, the strict division of the actors involved in both markets did not specifically favour the smooth accumulation of social capital. The shift from the small-stock trade to the cattle trade was therefore radical in most cases, with traders ceasing all activities in the former sector.

**Agriculture**

It was shown above that petty trading activities provided potential cattle traders with a financial basis for eventual involvement in the cattle trade. A similar function is related to the revenues generated by activities in the field of commercial agriculture. The sale of agricultural produce was found to facilitate a start in the cattle trade in three ways. First, the revenues can be used directly as working capital for cattle transactions. Second, they can be invested in the purchase of cattle with which a herd is constituted. This herd can then be used for trading activities at any point in the future. Third, the revenues can be used to enter some form of petty trading which itself forms a preliminary step towards a possible career in the cattle trade.

For most Bariba and Dendi traders of the present generation as well as for the generation of their fathers, agriculture has been a prime entry mode into the cattle trade. For those farmers who substantially exceeded subsistence levels in crop production and could sell their surplus of food and/or cash crops, the investment opportunities were confined to a small number of areas of which cattle constituted the most prominent. In the past, the Fulani pastoralists possessed cattle and because they were periodically in need of grains to supplement their food shortages, mutual exchange relationships, through which food crops were bartered against cattle, formed an essential part of their respective livelihoods. Through these exchange relations as well as through direct purchases of cattle, many farmers were able to build up a cattle herd. For some, and initially these included only the most 'innovative' characters (cf. Section 3.4), the ownership of a growing number of cattle persuaded them to enter the trade in cattle. From the 1980s onwards, however, expanding cotton production on the one hand and a rapid adoption rate of animal traction on the other have profoundly marked developments in the cattle trade. In short, farmer's investments in cattle have rapidly increased, their knowledge of, familiarisation with and connections in the cattle market multiplied and, as a result, entry into the cattle trade has become a much more obvious activity. The financial basis for a farmer was his cattle herd, a latent reservoir of working capital from which he could 'extract' any amount at any given moment in order to start a trading cycle.

The paragraphs above have paid particular attention to the ways in which traders could succeed in obtaining a working capital for the cattle trade. Some indications were
provided as to how these different entry modes could also provide them with the required minimum amount of social and knowledge capital. Here, we will briefly elaborate on a traditional means of getting acquainted with the know-how and relations component of the cattle trade which has benefited many cattle traders irrespective of their ethnic origin or of how they came to accumulate their economic capital. This concerns the practice of following an established cattle trader (see also Baier 1980, 174 on this phenomenon). Although this practice to some extent resembles the apprenticeship mechanism, the difference is in the fact that the starting traders in this situation have their own cattle and are not financially dependent on the trader they follow.

In the early decades of this century, the number of cattle traders in Benin was low and a few traders dominated the scene. Hence, someone who had the financial means or a certain number of animals with which he wanted to enter trade could request an already established trader from his region to 'follow' him on one or more of his trips to a particular destination market. Hence, the established trader facilitated all contacts at sales markets as well as en route. The cattle which belonged to the starting trader, usually a few animals only, would form part of the leading trader's much larger commercial herd. Especially during the first half of the century, when all cattle were transported on the hoof, herds being conveyed could consist of hundreds of animals and the frequency with which they were sent to distant destinations was relatively low. As a result, the conveyance of a commercial herd constituted an important event and the established trader usually had several starting traders in his entourage. Occasionally, a starting trader would assist in trekking this herd to its destination. Although the trekking of cattle could be seen as a service, delivered in exchange for benefiting from the established trader's experiences, 'following someone' was a phenomenon that involved elements of status as well. Thus, even while some starting cattle traders just paid their proportional share of the transportation costs according to the number of animals they brought along, these costs were usually accounted for by the established trader. Even today's traders emphasise the fact that for them to be followed by a starting trader is not only something which confers prestige but also something which 'has to be done'. They consider the act of accepting having someone follow them for a certain number of trips as something which is part of the system of norms and values and every Moslem cattle trader should act accordingly. In the present-day cattle trade, the practice of following an established trader in order to learn the ins and outs of business and to benefit from his contacts among landlords, for instance, is still widespread and continues to fulfil the function of providing smaller traders with an entry to long-distance destinations in particular. Some small or starting traders have referred to it as an apprenticeship.

6.3 Concluding remarks

The preceding sections have addressed three distinct entry modes for starting cattle traders. First, the roles of kinship members and apprenticeships were examined. We then discussed a more independent way of entering the cattle trade, for which the term 'self-made trader' was introduced. In brief, it was demonstrated how each of these entry modes facilitated the fulfilment of the preliminary requirements which condition access to the cattle trade. This concluding section provides some additional remarks which put the earlier sections in perspective. First of all, it is difficult to strictly designate each trader as having a particular entry mode. Some traders have unequivocally followed a single entry path, such as traders
who operated in a family enterprise or those who completed a lengthy apprenticeship, while others have combined aspects of various entry modes. For instance, the Fulani traders who obtained their economic capital via pre-inheritance cattle transfers had to supplement this with social contacts and knowledge of trading practices, something which was lacking in most of their families. Hence, it was involvement in petty trading activities, small-stock trade or contract herding which facilitated their access to the remaining forms of capital required. The practice of combining entry modes is further illustrated by the case of El Hadj Sambu. He clearly benefited from the social capital of his father but accumulated his economic capital in a way pertaining to a self-made trader, by combining the proceeds of petty trading and agriculture.

The father of El Hadj Sambu (Bariba) was an influential marabout who lived in a village near Banikoara. Unlike some of his uncles and stepbrothers who engaged in the cattle trade for the marabout, Sambu was sent to a Koranic school in Parakou where he spent eight years. Upon his return to the village, around 1963, Sambu started to buy and resell petrol. After a while, he managed to purchase a bike on which he set out for Djougou (some 200 kilometres to the south) to buy kola nuts for resale in Banikoara. One year later, the accumulated profits enabled him to purchase some sheep and goats around Founougo for resale in Djougou. In the meantime he had become well acquainted with the Djougou market where he visited the cattle section for observation purposes. His father's reputation which had spread as far as Djougou, nicely facilitated his contacts with leading traders in this town. Business went quite well and Sambu invested his profits mainly in agriculture (groundnuts, cotton and rice). With the proceeds of the harvest he bought steer calves which he entrusted to Fulani herders, many of whom had good relationships with his father. More cattle were bought when he expanded the number of plots he cultivated. Finally, after a harvest in the late 1960s, he had gathered 19 bulls and sent them, on the hoof, to Parakou. In Parakou where he had studied for eight years, he already knew several people at the cattle market which facilitated the sale of his animals.

The case of El Hadj Sambu shows the advantage of drawing from distinct sources in order to 'compose' an individual entry mode. Furthermore, it points to an additional factor which concerns the time required to cover a particular entry mode. For instance, it took Sambu approximately 5 to 6 years before he effectively entered the trade in cattle. Likewise, the apprenticeship of Bani Soumaila took a comparable number of years. Other traders, on the contrary, would force their access into the cattle trade at a rapid pace. Some immigrant Fulani traders from Niger only spent one or two years in petty trading and made a number of trips as cattle herders for established traders before purchasing their own cattle. Of course, the major difference between the immigrant traders and Sambu is in the size of their initial transactions. Sambu sold 19 bulls on his first trip to Parakou, which gave him a head start compared to the other traders. Nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to establish a relationship between the duration of the entry mode and the size of initial transactions. In fact, it poses the question of what factors eventually determine the success and failure of cattle traders. Does a relationship with the entry mode exist, and how important is the quick accumulation of capital at an early stage for the career of a cattle trader? Is eventual success a question of talent and business intuition, or do structural factors such as the macroeconomic setting at a specific moment determine this? These questions will be dealt with in Chapter 7 which extends our discussion of entry modes to the analysis of accumulation during a trader's career.
In the early decades of this century, the number of bacteria on the instrument and in the solution decreased, as it had been

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