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Nkwi, W.G.

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Kfaang and its technologies

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Kfaang and its technologies

Towards a social history of mobility
in Kom, Cameroon, 1928-1998

Walter Gam Nkwi

African Studies Centre
P.O. Box 9555
2300 RB Leiden
The Netherlands
asc@ascleiden.nl
<http://www.ascleiden.nl>

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[The Parish archives, Njinikom. Photo taken by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs]

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Introduction: Theory and progress of *kfaang*

This thesis is a social history of Kom in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It focuses on the relationship between mobility, Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) and social hierarchies from 1928 to 1998. It deals with how ICTs alter processes of social change, more specifically social mobility, and how the introduction and appropriation of various technologies such as motor roads, motor vehicle, the church and the school together contributed to the geographical and social mobility and social change in Kom. The significance of 1928 for this thesis lies in the fact that, according to informants, the school, St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikom and the church were opened in Kom in that year and they made Kom one of the first technological hubs in the Bamenda Grasslands. It was also in that year that Kom people actively participated in the construction of a new 72 kilometres-long road which linked Kom and Bamenda. In 1998 that road was upgraded when it was tarred. Consequently, the Fon, the paramount ruler of Kom, was able to visit Kom people in Bamenda in that year in his motor car, something that had not happened before.

The key concept of this study is *kfaang*. On it turns ICTs and mobility. To the Kom people *kfaang*, connotes newness – innovation and novelty in thinking and doing, and the material indicators and relationships that result from it. *Kfaang* maybe internally generated, but it is almost invariably externally induced. In many ways, it translates but is not limited to 'modernity' and 'modernization' in the Western sense, as things of local origin might also be labelled *kfaang*, even when clearly not foreign or Western. The most important characteristic of *kfaang* therefore is that which is 'new', and this might come from within or without or be something simply internally generated that is not the characteristic way of seeing and doing. Kom people accepted and appropriated it only when it was relevant in their needs. Depending upon the circumstances *kfaang* denotes a process and a product. Both involve change mediated by mobility and by implication the technologies which facilitated spatial and social mobility. How much did *kfaang* change Kom and those who embraced it? How was *kfaang* conceived, perceived, translated, interpreted, adapted and appropriated by Kom people?

Using Kom as a case study and focusing on the relationship between ICTs, mobility and social hierarchy, this study attempts to provide an historical perspective for understanding the social changes that have occurred in African societies between 1928 and 1998. Proceeding from the premise that the relationship between technology and society is dialectical, the argument of this thesis has been summarised in three state-

ments, namely: That the change of Kom between 1928 and 1998 was inscribed in social dynamics around the appropriation of ICTs and expressed in geographical and social mobility; that for *kfaang* to be anchored deeply in Kom it had to be accepted, interpreted and appropriated; and that Kom cultural identity is not essentialist but rather constructed, fluid and flexible.

Below is the profile of an informant, Benedicta, whose experience is representative of *kfaang* in Kom and therefore buttresses the main argument of this work.

BENEDICTA NENG YOUNG, is 73 years and lives in Njinikom, a village in Kom, Cameroon. She has six children- five boys and one girl. The first son lives in the United States of America. The second child lives at Fundong, another village in Kom. Her third child is a captain in the Cameroon army. The fourth child is a businessman in Njinikom. The fifth child is the only girl and a university graduate. She lives in Yaounde, the administrative capital city of Cameroon. The last son is married to a German woman and is living and studying in the Technical University, Munich of Germany.

Benedicta was born in 1937 at Njinikom (...). At a tender age she went to St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikom and was one among few girls. She told me that Kom people used to call the school in their language, *ndo ngwali kfaang* (the school of newness). When she got to standard 4 the manager of the school, Rev. Fr. Groot, decreed that girls were to further their education at the Convent School at Shisong, Nso, Cameroon some 140 km from Kom. She and other girls went to Shisong. At Shisong, she was baptised, and the new name Benedicta was given to her. By then there were no motorable roads, (*ndzi kfaang*). There were no vehicles (*afuem a kfaang*) as one will find today. There were no post offices and there were no telephones (*fincha fi kfaang*). Benedicta and the other girls trekked to Shisong. The journey to Shisong took Benedicta and her friends three days. When they left Njinikom they slept at Anyajua, another village in Kom, just near the (*aku, a wain mum*) Wain Mum's forest. The next day they went to Oku, a neighbour of Kom and slept in the palace. The following day they reached Shisong.

At all these stops they ate food which they had carried along with them to sustain their energy (...) They also carried their personal belongings. After every three months they returned to Kom on holidays. In Shisong, Benedicta entered standard 5 in 1951 and in 1952 passed to standard 6 (...). After completing primary school in Shisong, she went to the Queen of Holy Rosary College; Onitsha, Nigeria (...). She took a car for her first time in Bamenda the capital city of Northwest Cameroon, to Mamfe, a town situated in Southwest Cameroon. Before proceeding to Nigeria via Mamfe, she had spent three days to reach Bamenda. At Bamenda she stayed at Kubou's compound, the first Kom compound out of Kom which later became the Kom palace. She met new friends from other parts of the Cameroons but Onitsha was too far for her to continue schooling.

A school of Nursing and Midwifery was opened in Shisong. Benedicta's parents preferred her to go to Shisong (...). She spent one year at Shisong and returned to Nigeria again for one more year. There she graduated from Abakiliki Nursing School. After graduating from Abakiliki, she got her first appointment in Cameroon with the Wum Rural Council in 1957 (...) and her next job was in Tiko, Southwest Region of Cameroon situated some 450 km from Kom with the Cameroon Development Cooperation (CDC) hospital. She worked there for 8 months, (...) applied and got admitted into the University Teaching College, Ibadan, Nigeria. She studied in Ibadan for three years, obtained her Diploma and then went to Lagos where she met Kom people and some of her classmates with whom she had schooled in Njinikom.

Benedicta returned to Cameroon in 1962 and worked with the General Hospital in Bamenda at a time when Kom people in Bamenda already had their meeting and Kom Association in Old Town, (a quarter in Bamenda) at Mr. Kubou's compound. She became a member of that Association. After a while she left her three kids with her parents in the village and went to visit her elder brother, Arnold Yongbang, in Lagos. From there she went to England for a two year course. Upon completion of her studies in England she was employed by the Cameroon public service. She worked successively at Ngaoundere, Nkongsamba, Mbanga, Buea, Yaounde; Benedicta also worked in Douala and was transferred to Fuanantui, Njinikom, where she spent ten years. She retired in 1998 and was the first woman to own a medicine store, Royal Diamond Chemist. She was also the first Kom woman to buy, own and drive a car, Renault 4 in 1964. During her retirement she constructed her own house which appeared 'modern' in Kom. She maintains that Kom had changed so much from what it used to be in the 1940s and 1950s-the road had been tarred, vehicles come to Kom daily (...).

It is not too far-fetched to state that Benedicta's career as one of the pillars of *kfaang* was unique. Her life raises issues of gender. In her case it seems that it was very unusual for Kom women at that time to go that far without their husbands, an issue that has not yet been given an in-depth study in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon. Other women who could be said to have emulated her were Fuam, who travelled out of Kom to Victoria; the royal wives from Laikom, capital of Kom, who migrated to Njinikom in the early years of Christianity and Juliana Ekwi Chiambong who played a significant role in social change in Kom. Benedicta was also the first woman in Kom to own and drive a car, construct her own house and own a medicine store. Her appropriation of all those things was because she had been to school and that led to her geographical and social mobility. Her story and other women as well who were enterprising deserve a place in this thesis. They collectively and individually represent 'new women' or *kfaang* women.

The story of Benedicta and the other women shows similarities, contrast and complements with that of Anyway Ndichia Timti. His profile is also relevant to us in this thesis.

According to Kom informants, corroborated by private archival material Anyway Ndichia Timti was born at Ngwaah, another village in Kom in 1912. He never went to school but instead entered the Kom palace in 1924 as a page, *nchinda*, where he served until 1942. It means he served in the palace for 18 years.

In Kom tradition, *nchindas* who were loyal in their duties were upon leaving the palace rewarded with two wives by the Fon and his executive arm, *nkwifoyn*. Anyway was not given the two wives because it was claimed that he was stubborn. As a consequence he moved out of Kom in 1943. In 1948, Anyway sued Fon Ndi in the court, a situation that was unheard before then claiming that he had served the Fon for 18 years without pay. The Fon responded that he was not compensated because he was stubborn. The chief judge had to rule in the favour of the Fon fearing that if Anyway won then most of the NA and principles of the Indirect Rule principles would soon be lost credibility.

Anyway then moved to the coastal region of Cameroon in 'disappointment and frustration'. While at the Coast he bought farmland first in Muyuka and later in Tiko where he cultivated cocoa and coffee. He experienced and embraced *kfaang* as western education. In the early 1950s he was responsible for the construction of the first primary school in Fundong which he later on handed over to the Mill Hill Missionaries. Not surprisingly he sponsored children in that school and paid teachers. The missionaries were accountable to him. He died in 1965 and was buried in New Town Parish cemetery, Victoria.

Anyway Ndichia Timti complements and contrasts with that of Benedicta. He internalised *kfaang* and largely constituted the wave of the future through his own efforts to bring education and 'scholarship' which he bestowed upon pupils, and paid teachers to his people. He is also an example that shows how some of the mobile people who returned to Kom created tension with the existing indigenous hierarchy. Together with Benedicta and other several other informants such people constitute the *kfaang* men or *kfaang* women or 'new men'/'new women'.

The colonial school, colonial church and the possibilities which they provided, accelerated the geographical and social mobility of people, accounted for cross cultural encounters and for social change. Kom was changing and so were also its people. The very names 'Benedicta' and 'Anyway' were symbolic of social change. The former was baptised with that name when she moved to Shisong and Anyway was baptised in Victoria. But the question is how deeply was she and other many people changed by being baptised with such new names?

According to Benedicta and other informants, Kom people came to brand things from outside as ‘newness’, *kfaang*. This newness was contrasted with what was traditional and indigenous but similar to ‘modernity’. Did Benedicta’s experience exemplify what Kom people saw and perceived as modernity? Or did *kfaang* mean something deeper than modernity? The next section attempts to answer these questions and thus set the stage for a discussion of communication technology and mobility as phenomena of *kfaang*. Thus the equation, Technology + Mobility = Social Change, and thus also the emic understanding of *kfaang*.

Tradition and modernity in *kfaang*

According to Fo Angwafo (2009: 70), ‘we are actively modernising our tradition and traditionalising our modernity’. These words seemed to best describe the concept of *kfaang*. The historicity of modernity and modernisation seems to be entangled within the European experience which ignored Africa as part of the globe. Modernisation was rooted in post-enlightenment Europe and was defended on the grounds of its change of European society from an agrarian to an industrial one.

In all these, its apologists strongly held that such change did not occur in African societies because they were understood to be static and their people were primitive hunter gatherers. This was just another way of denying Africa’s great indigenous achievements (Depelchin, 2005: 19-28). Enough literature however exists to show that Africa, especially from the 19th century, was part of the global processes (Wallerstein, 1986 and 2005; Forde and Kaberry, 1967; Ranger, 1963; Vansina, 1966; Oliver & Mathew, 1963; Thornton, 1992; Eltis, 1993). As Ferguson (1999: 14) has argued ‘the modernisation myth was bad social science because it was restricted and even so based on misconceptions about modern African history’. In other words, modernisation was not as it was claimed, because Africa was not considered as part of the global processes. Fundamental to the understanding of modernisation is the fact that for any meaningful change to take place in any society the movement of people, ideas and cultures is necessary and there should be social and political reorganisation of that society. Modernisation can in some ways be understood through the development of ICTs and forms of mobility.

As the concept ‘modernisation’ was justified as a European and North American idea, so modernity is seen as something that was uniquely European. It was carried overseas and imposed on Africans by the Europeans. Over the years scholars have written about modernity from different perspectives (see Ferguson, 1999; Appadurai, 1986; Fardon et al., 1999; Geschier et al., 2008; Havik, 2009; Brinkman et al., 2009; Giddens, 1990; Macamo, 2005; Deutsch et al., 2002; Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993).

The literature on modernity suggests that it is a problematic term and when seen through analytical ‘binoculars it is quite slippery ambiguous and vague’ (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1993: xii), because it seems that different societies and communities have their own way of perceiving and understanding the concept which has been largely coloured by being too ‘closely connected to western ideologies of universal development’. In other words, modernity can best be understood if we contextualize it in different world societies because there are peculiar ways of understanding and perceiving it. What it means for one society might not necessary mean the same for another one.

Two scholars whose use of the concept has partially inspired me are Cooper (2005: 176-193) and Ferguson (2006: 176-193). According to Cooper, ‘the most ordinary

meaning of modern (*ity*) is that which is new, that which is distinguishable from the past'. This seems a better way of looking at the concept, but Cooper does not say anything about the contents of modernity or the socio-cultural and economic impact of that phenomenon on changing societies. While leaning on other scholars, Ferguson went further than Cooper. According to him, '(...) modern Africa is today understood as a place of bricolage and creative invention where bits and pieces of what used to be called western modernity are picked up, combined with local resources and put back together'. By implication, Ferguson meant that modernity was not a 'one way traffic concept'. It is applicable when it combines what is indigenous and foreign.

To Kom people, modernity is understood as newness and they called it *kfaang*. This modernity, reflected in Benedicta's story and those of other informants, has to be accepted, translated, interpreted, adapted and appropriated by the people. It has a socio-economic and political impact on a society like Kom by changing and creating new social hierarchies. For Kom people, *kfaang* was not uprooted elsewhere and transplanted into their society. Kom people only accepted *kfaang* because it had relevance to them and their society and, more importantly, it was acquired their geographical and social mobility. The mobility of Kom people introduced *kfaang* in Kom. This was not only because the people were able to navigate and negotiate with their different global encounters abroad and at home, but also with what was internally generated and invariably externally induced.

It goes without saying that to anchor *kfaang* Kom people did not have to abandon all their traditions. The hybrid was not something totally new, neither was it totally old. As Ferguson tells us, it is selecting bits of the foreign and blending it with what is indigenous without dramatically disrupting the stability of the society. According to Comaroff & Comaroff (1992: 112) 'new political cultures were born from countless couplings of local and global worlds, from intersecting histories that refocused European values and intentions, thus rerouting, if not reversing, the march of modernity. This great historical process was also instrumental in remaking economy and society at home'. As excellent as this appears, it does not specify the contents of modernity.

As a result *kfaang* was not a zero-sum game, neither was it a 'winner takes all' one. Cross-culturalism and conviviality played a central role for *kfaang* to be understood and accepted in Kom. This meant that spaces were created in the process for the two cultural worlds to survive. *Kfaang* had to be relevant in context. The content of *kfaang* constituted, *ndzi kfaang* or new roads, *afuem a kfaang* carpenter bee of newness which was the motor vehicle, the new school, (*ndo ngwali kfaang*) the new church, (*iwo fiyini fyie kfaang*) new trees, (*ghii ka mghii kfaang*) new clothes, (*dzisi kfaang*) new plates, (*ghii kang-a-kfaang*) new spoons, (*ghii tuass-ghi-kfaang*) to name only a few. Most of the carriers of *kfaang* were mobile people and those who accessed *kfaang* like education and schooling became very 'mobile' and this changed their status. They went to school because schooling was relevant to their context.

The case for the relevance of *kfaang* is captured in the *Song of Lawino* by Okot p'Bitek. Although not writing from the perspective of Kom and *kfaang*, p'Bitek (1966: 13-17) enables us to better understand and drive home the point which we are making here. At one point, the author puts the words in the mouth of an 'uneducated' woman in the western sense whose husband was well educated. The husband tends to abuse the wife and in-laws in very impeccable English telling them that 'they have eyes but cannot see; ears but cannot hear and cannot understand the Bible (...).' In other words people who appropriated *kfaang* did so because it was relevant to their needs. Why

should somebody go to school or church when he or she does not see the relevance? Against this background there is no better way to understand *kfaang*, than the words of Fo Angwafor, '(...) our modernity only makes sense to the extent that it is firmly grounded in our traditions' (Fo Angwafor, 2009: 70). By and large, in this work *kfaang* means consciously indigenising our modernities and modernising our indigeneity. Unlike the Fon of Kom, Fo Angwafor, is educated and reflects what happened in his Fondom and other Fondoms of the region like Kom. In doing so he is more explicit in the way he expresses his view.

Accordingly, *kfaang* has been used all through this work as a negotiated process resulting from global and local encounters through geographical and social mobility of Kom people. The definition of modernity by scholars to mean the same thing to different societies is not confirmed by Kom experience. Kom experience of *kfaang* as exemplified by Benedicta and other Kom informants is different. Although in most circumstances *kfaang* was alien, in origin, it is important to emphasise that to be exposed to it there must be a degree of social and physical mobility. Was the role played by *kfaang* in the change of Kom and its people deep or superficial? What was the impact of appropriating *kfaang* on Kom cultural identity or 'Komness'? How resistant or receptive were Kom people to *kfaang*? In other words, were the 'carriers' of *kfaang* in Kom completely assimilated into *kfaang* to the same degree as Europeans? This study attempts to answer these questions and that attempt begins with a discussion of the other two key concepts, namely ICTs and mobility.

Information communication technology (ICT)

With the advent of new ICTs like the internet, cell phones, and computers, there has been much attention paid to the subject by many scholars. Yet very little has been researched on the historical perspective of ICTs. Nyamnjoh (1998: 42-57) provided an inventory of indigenous instruments of ICTs in Cameroon which included the talking drums, bahama grass, boundary stems and royal spears. Gewalt (2002: 257-285) researched the impact of the introduction of the motor car amongst the Hereros of Namibia, while Andah (1992) provided an inventory of Nigeria's indigenous technologies. Andah (1992: 5) describes indigenous technology in such basic facets of life as food production, medicine, architecture and domestic/ industrial crafts as against the backdrop of dynamic historical settings.

Communication technology is defined here as simply technology that eases social mobility and denotes those novelties such as roads, vehicles, school and the churches which informants like Benedicta perceived as *kfaang*.

According to Benedicta, she attended St. Anthony's Primary School and later went to Shisong because the Rev. Fr. Groot 'decreed' girls should continue there. She went with her classmates, who were also girls. She later schooled in Nigeria and United Kingdom and at each of these places she met some of her classmates from Kom. School was a particular form of technology. If the aim of the technology is to connect, disconnect and also to transform the society then it is reasonable to consider school as a technology. Moreover, Kom people saw these technologies as newness and progress. So also are cell phones and internet today seen as newness and progress, although still debatable. For many people and societies, technology means to be forward-looking and progressive. In addition to schools, other forms of technology like the churches, the roads and motor

vehicles are seen as technologies. They were first of all accepted, then appropriated and made useful in the social context of Kom.

Most literature on technology focuses on new technologies such as the internet, computers and engines. Some scholars have studied ICTs in the light of politics to show how they accelerate democracy in Africa (Ochara, 2009). Conversely, Soltane (2004) and others have demonstrated how ICTs could interfere in governing processes. They have invented new terminologies such as E-governance, cyber-democracy, digital democracy and E-participation. Bhoomi (2009) made a similar study in India which focuses on e-governance and the right to information for this purpose. Ochara (2009), Navarra & Cornford (2009) also conducted a similar study in Kenya in which they examined the government policy of flexibility in an e-government project. Their conclusions are that the new technologies have revolutionised and improved in many ways the way governance is executed.

Teferra (2004) carried out research on how knowledge could be produced and distributed in African universities using ICTs. The author also examines how the ICTs are affecting teaching, research and other scholarly activities that have long remained under-studied in African educational systems. The author concludes that 'there is a strong belief that a solid and reliable ICT infrastructure can serve as a panacea to many of the problems and ills of scientific communication, and in particular for scientific research as a whole'. Beebe et al. (2003), provide a discussion of Africa's higher education environment and the importance of ICT for academics, professionals and policy makers. Others like James (2004), Rubens and du Plessis, (2004: 16-32) and Unwin, (2004: 150-160) have studied the internet as technology. So far these works have focused on new technologies. They tend to see ICTs only in terms of the internet, mobile phone and computers. Their main shortcoming has been their failure to go beyond new technologies. Again, their conclusions indicate progress in education as result of the introduction of new technologies.

Discussions with Benedicta and other Kom informants and the readings of the literature on ICT demonstrate that technology cannot be reduced to hardware, spanners, internet, computers and engines but further shows the relationship between technology and society. Scholars like Callon (1986), Latour (1989), Callon & Law (1989) and Jones & Graham (2003) have fully developed the relationship between technology and society in what they called the Actor-Network (ANT) theory in their research programme at the *Ecole des Mines* in Paris. But this thesis is not only about technology *per se*. It is about technology and mobility and how the former is useful for the latter.

In the light of the above, this thesis attempts to consider technology in the following ways: First, how Technology shapes society on one hand and on the other how it domesticates and shapes the technology. The technology would have no meaning if the society failed to accept and contextualize it. Second, how technology consists not only of gadgets and things like engines, iron tools and spanners or cell phones, internet, computers, hardware and software but also new institutions and techniques introduced into Kom which are, accommodated and made socially useful, meaningful and relevant to the society. Third, how technology helps to further promote social change of a society at the social, political, and even economic and individual levels and raises questions about the identity of those who appropriate it. Fourth, how technology has meaning when it is used in relation to something. Machines can be technology but only when they are socially shaped. We might call that the 'social shaping of technology' (SCOT), to borrow an acronym from Pinch & Bijker (1989). This means that even when

technology is a metal tool; it needs to be socially constructed, meaning that people have to re-shape it in order to make its usefulness adapt to their context. Technology therefore is dynamic and not static. The fact that this thesis is about layers of technologies which according to Kom people included churches, schools, motor vehicles and the roads goes closer to Headrick (1986: 4-5), who maintains that:

(...) the history of technology once consisted of nuts and bolts; stories of great inventors and famous engineers. Today technologies are no longer viewed as 'externalities' that arise fortuitously from the minds, geniuses, but as an intrinsic part of the culture and economy of every society (...) the work of the social historian of technology is to study the economic and cultural context in which innovations arise and, in turn, their impact upon the societies in which they appear.

In this thesis viewing technology as Headrick does was inspired by the ideas of other scholars. For example, Armstrong (2004: 10-11) has defined technology thus:

The phrase has become so fashionable that it is at times misunderstood. Some people used it at times to mean only new technologies like the internet, satellite based communications, cellular phones and computer systems. ICTs in reality have been around a long time since long before the first satellite were put up into the orbit, and even long before the computer was invented so to speak of the ICT only in terms of the new technology will do more harm than good. Take the IT from Information Technology and put a 'C' in the middle for communication. And that is Information Communication Technology. To talk about the IT is to talk about exclusively the hardware, the systems, the platforms and infrastructures. To talk of the ICT is to talk also about what animates the IT-communication, the content, the stuff flowing through the pipes.

Armstrong very strongly upholds this view of ICTs. He does not consider ICTs as something radically new and unprecedented. He enumerates a long list of what he thinks make up ICTs. They are Internet and Internet/e-mail technologies, satellites, satellite receivers/uplinks and satellite technologies, phone handsets, telephone infrastructure (wire and wireless), telephone technologies/platforms, computer hardware and soft hardware, computer printers, scanners, disks, and flash drives. There are also fax machines, facsimile technology, cameras (still and video, analogue and digital), television sets and TV broadcasting systems films, Morse code, telegraph, telex, the printing press, paper with ink and carbon. Armstrong's view comes closer to the view of technology as used in this study.

Pinch & Bijker (1989: 30) and Bijker (1995) maintain that the key requirement of social construction of technology 'is that all members of a certain social group share the same set of meanings attached to a specific artefact (...) we must first ask whether the artefact has any meaning at all for the members of the social group under investigation'. Law & Bijker (1992: 11) and Wallace (1982) maintain that technology is ever-present and has something to do with people both at work places and at home. According to these scholars, 'The study of technology, then, has immediate political and social relevance. And to be sure because technology is treated as one of the major motors of economic growth; it has similar economic and policy relevance' (Law & Bijker, 1992: 11).

Mobility

The story of Benedicta as well as of Anyway is about geographical and social mobility. Human beings are mobile beings and mobility is an old phenomenon. People in Africa have always been mobile and their mobility might be as old as humanity itself. Scholars have studied mobility from many perspectives. For instance, Amin (1974) shows that migrations are not new to Africa. According to him, modern migrations are related to

labour problems and he classifies them as: rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, internal and international migrations. Adepoju (1995, 2010, 2008 and 2007) claims that 'Africa is a continent of considerable (...) migrations and various movements in response to political, social, economic, religious and security situations have been recorded from earliest times'. De Bruijn & van Dijk (2003) and Waller (1985), studied population mobility in West Africa with a special focus on the Fulbe pastoralists of Central and South Mali. They came to the conclusion that 'mobility was one of the most important responses by the inhabitants of the Sahel to climatic adversity'. These scholars have collectively and individually studied mobility in terms of travelling or migratory cultures.

In 2008, Benedicta was just one of the many Kom who had had similar experiences with mobility. Anyway too had similar experiences but died early in 1965. However, Benedicta's story showed that women too were effectively mobile in their own right contrary to what most of the literature shows. It was important to know why illiterate Kom such as Anyway Ndichia travelled outside Kom, what became of them and how they differed from so-called educated Kom when *kfaang* was concerned. Benedicta's story seems to suggest that mobility and social change are directly correlated. Although change and mobility are inherent features of societies something else is needed to trigger social change in the society. St. Anthony's school which Benedicta mentioned, known in Kom as *ndo gwali kfaang*, was one such a trigger.

A majority of the people in the area had no schooling, but Kom experienced new, significant social changes during approximately seventy years, to judge by her story (1928-1998). It could also be gathered from her that Kom people formed associations like the one in Bamenda, of which she was a member. Indirectly, her story touched on the relationship between school and her geographical and social mobility. This makes one re-think and re-focus one's view of the concept of mobility, school and the people who appropriated them and what they became in their societies. It seems certain that the school, the church, the motor road, the motor vehicle which she mentioned in her narrative and which had reached Kom society by 1928, could be rightly seen as technologies, and were partly but also instrumentally responsible for certain social changes in Kom.

The mobility of people inside Africa has been a major issue for scholars who have studied it in multiple perspectives. But the advent of new ICTs in most societies in Africa has accelerated the geographical mobility of people. At the same time the movement of people across borders has become a daily problem to statesmen and governments. Consequently, there is a need to study these changes from an historical perspective. Scholars have shown that the factors responsible for these migrations differ but that the outstanding factor since the beginnings of the colonial rule has been labour. For instance, Harris' (1994) work on the migrant labour from Mozambique to the sugarcane plantations, diamond and gold mines of South Africa shows how these migrants arrived in South Africa with different values. But their contacts with other Africans and whites enabled them to forge a new type of culture. Davidson's work on migrant labour in the Gold Coast (Davidson, 1954) and van Onselen's (1984) on Southern Africa show the relationship which existed between labour migration and different forms of communication and labour identity in Southern Rhodesia between 1900 and 1933. What is important in the work by Harris, Davidson and van Onselen, apart from labour migration, is the construction of a dynamic culture which was a synthesis or hybrid of the migrant culture and that of South Africa. This is true of

Benedicta and Kom people. A new Kom culture was created by the ability of Kom to re-construct their culture in the midst of other cultures as they migrated to distant geographical spaces. To what extent, then, did Kom people succeed in maintaining their cultural values and norms in the course of their geographical mobility? Did their identity remain essentialist, bounded in nature, in time and space?

It is necessary to consider whether mobility can be fully understood without giving it a historical dimension. History is useful for a fuller understanding of present day change in societies, especially because it helps us to better understand and explain current events by relating them to the past. Could history alone provide an accurate photo of the social changes in Kom since 1928? By answering these questions and several others, this thesis contributes to the existing knowledge of Kom, Cameroon and specifically to an understanding of the relationship between society, technology and mobility and how they combined to transform Kom society.

The story of Benedicta shows that her mobility seems to open a new perspective that has not been adequately treated, in the literature on mobility in Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon – the attempt of Kom people to create a place which resembles home out of home in the course of their spatial mobility. Although her story is linked to labour from when she was employed, it is the special labour of schooling and its aftermath. Forster (1965) and Berry (1986) have done some work on mobility and education in Ghana and Western Nigeria respectively. The works of de Bruijn & van Dijk and many others are about movements due to ecological crisis and how the Fulbes deal with this type of adversity.

While in school in Nso, Nigeria or the United Kingdom, Benedicta always returned home on holidays, and while in Bamenda she was a member of the Kom Association that met at Kubou's compound. Kubou was the first Kom man to build a home in Bamenda in the 1920s. From her story and those of many other informants, one can rightly conclude that school was one of the factors which played a decisive role in the geographical and social mobility of Kom people.

The Kom Association in Bamenda, is an example of the way the people moved. Once out of home they started re-creating their culture by staying in touch with their home villages. Benedicta's life is a story of what Appadurai calls 'Translocality'. According to Appadurai (1996: 178), 'Translocality is understood as an ambiguous space of experiences and agency, a space that does not exist absolutely but is created by interconnections of mobile people, ideas and objects'. In other words, Kom people were creating a space which resembled their place of origin, Kom, in terms of cultural practices like traditional dances, dress and festivals. The geographical mobility of Kom people appeared to have been what Gupta & Ferguson (1992: 17) call 'de-territorialisation and territorialisation'. These terms have to do with spatial mobility. They suggest that because of flexible mobility people are not confined to particular places. People can now move and recreate their territory of origin in distant spaces. This appears relevant to Kom experiences because as they moved out they de-territorialised Kom and re-territorialised it in distant places.

Another striking insight from discussions with Benedicta was the way she viewed her village from the distance of urban spaces. This was characteristic of Kom people as well as other peoples in Africa. Rural-urban relations are an age-old theme that has been explored in the literature of migration in Africa. Busia (1950: 12) in a social survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, showed that 'a person's membership of a lineage binds him forever to his village, its locality and that wherever he may go; however long he/she may be

away, he/she belongs to his lineage town or village (...)' . Gugler (1961) studied Eastern Nigerians in town and concluded that they lived in a dual system in which they were responsible to village development associations while trying to cope with city life. Geschiere & Gugler (1998: 309-319) show how an urbanite might choose to remain in the city but also always remain tied in some way with his or her home. Gugler (2002: 21-41) maintains that research on the urban-rural connection needs to be conducted elsewhere on the continent because of the 'wrenching changes its people have experienced over the last generation'. Geschiere, Busia and Gugler here were only setting the agenda for scholars to study rural-urban migrations in Africa. The experience of Kom people is just one contribution to this ongoing work.

In Cameroon this kind of rural-urban mobility takes place through associations such as the one which Benedicta and many others informed us about. These associations of mobile people are home town groupings through which members are called upon to actively participate in home developmental projects. These associations enjoyed the renewed attention of scholars of contemporary Cameroon, particularly in connection with identity studies and politics of belonging since the 1990s (See Nyamnjoh & Rowlands, 1998: 320-337; Englund, 2002: 137-154; Gam Nkwi, 2006c: 123-143).

These studies on rural-urban mobility are still relevant today. However, their conclusions can be re-examined and their scope enlarged by incorporating the social history of those they have studied. How did these people in town or in the city try to recreate and re-invent themselves and in what specific ways did they relate to their home villages? The story of Benedicta and Kubou's compound indicates that there was something intrinsic in the construction of Kom out of Kom which has not yet been given adequate attention by historians. That phenomenon is known as 'Komness' and needs to be studied.

'Komness', it is gathered from the experience of Benedicta and other informants, concerns *identity* – the characteristic which Kom people hold on to, even when they are in distant spaces. It is the 'core culture' of Kom people. From Benedicta's story, one learns that it consists of language, food, traditional dress and festivals. Benedicta and others, while they lived out of Kom, reconstructed the classical Kom culture. After a number of years away from home they re-shaped the original, and negotiated themselves with others. As a result, therefore, Kom people are always involved in a creative process by re-shaping what was originally 'classical' Kom. 'Komness' therefore will refer to a set of values, norms and practices. Kom people moved away from home to places like Bamenda, Victoria, Kumba and Tiko. They appeared changed but at the same time retained some aspects 'Komness'. From Benedicta and other informants, it could be deduced that no matter how a Kom person imbibed *kfaang*, 'Komness' was still cherished and sustained.

The mobility of Kom people was spatial, social, external and internal. By spatial mobility we mean the physical movement of Kom people. In the course of their mobility many things happened. The story of Kubou's compound shows how Kom people in their geographical mobility created belongingness and a representation of Kom identity in diasporic spaces. The term 'diasporic places' needs further explanation and clarification. Diaspora has come to mean mainly Africans living outside of Africa, and little research has been done so far on diasporic migrants living within Africa. The term here is used to denote Kom migrants who lived at Kubou's compound and those who ventured to other parts of coastal Cameroon. The term was given further clarification and meaning by Bakewell (2008) who argued that 'very little research has been

done on diaspora in the African continent. Africa is a continent which generates diasporas rather than one in which diasporas can be found'. Bakewell was alluding to the internal or continental diaspora which has not been adequately studied by scholars with an interest in migration. In this thesis, the specific diaspora denotes mobile Kom population found within Cameroon Grasslands, especially in Bamenda because it was in Bamenda that the first Kom Association was formed. Occasionally, it will refer to the coastal plantations. Social mobility is defined here as upward mobility or change for the better change in social status.

De Bruijn et al. (2001: 1) state that 'mobility is engrained in the history, daily life and experiences of people (...) mobility as an umbrella term encompasses all types of movement including travel, exploration, migration, tourism, refugeeism, pastoralism, nomadism, pilgrimage and trade'. In a similar vein, de Bruijn et al. (2001: 65) have also studied the movement of ideas through 'cultures of travel amongst the Fulbe pastoralists in central Mali and Pentecostalism in Ghana. They have demonstrated in both cases that 'mobility has acquired momentum in itself that may be labelled a culture of travel. A field of practices, institutions, and ideas and reflections related to mobility and travelling, which has acquired a specific dynamism of its own, has arisen out of interaction with conditions on the ground'. According to Urry (2000) mobility is not only about people moving but also of objects and ideas.

The geographical mobility of Kom people as exemplified by Benedicta and other informants was rural-rural; rural-urban and urban-rural. To a large extent it was internal mobility going beyond Bamenda. From 1928 to c. 1961 they went as far as Kumba, Tiko, Victoria, Nkongsamba and some parts of Nigeria like Yola, Ibi, Onitsha and Calabar. From 1961 to 1998, with improvements in road and information communication coupled with the civil administration policies regarding the transfer of civil servants, they moved to many more parts of Cameroon which do not fall within the scope of this work. In addition to the concepts which are central to this thesis, there are the concepts of social hierarchies and identity which are known here as the 'construction of society', to which we now turn our attention.

The 'construction of society'

The way a society is constructed and changes shows that people always create and recreate different statuses which are hierarchical. This evolution of new hierarchies in different circumstances comes about as a result of innovative changes in the society. The change might be because of the way a society is structured. Often social or power relations change but all these are based on the existing structures in the society. Power relations reflect hierarchies and the organization of the society. The way the society is structured determines social relations. In more recent times the class of people who appropriated different types of wealth were those who were schooled and also those who moved out of the society for 'greener pastures', such as the youth. These people translated their social connections into identity. Consequently, who a person is in the society is defined by his or her social relations with who or what. Thus, identity and belonging as well as identity and power positions determine the status of social hierarchies in a particular society.

Benedicta's story is quite revealing: It shows how she had changed. What explains this change is her physical mobility, first by appropriating education and schooling. She was one amongst many people to do so and she and many other people were able to

leave home because of schooling. Schooling determined her spatial and social mobility and that of many others, since those who went to school acquired a specific status. They were the ones who were able to access and appropriate this particular technology and through it assume different identities and achieve positions of power and influence in the society.

Those who did not go to school were also geographically mobile for different reasons. They took a different path such as going to coastal Cameroon to work in the plantations. Others bought farms and employed wage labour. For example in 1955, James Nsah became the first Kom person to buy a motor car. Nsah henceforth belonged to another class and rose to a different social status not because he had been to school but because of economic achievement. Many such cases existed in Kom. Those who went to school identified themselves with school and that experience connected them.

Identity is a complex concept and appears to have gained its prominence only in modern sociological thought. Sociologists dealing with that concept in the 1970s were pre-occupied with the 'me' in trying to investigate the avenues through which interpersonal relations created the self in an individual. Cooper & Brubaker (2005: 51-91), writing on identity, maintain that 'everybody seeks an identity', adding that 'identity is fluid, constructed and contested'. In other words identity is not bounded or rigid. It is created. The authors argue 'not for a more precise word to replace identity but rather for the use of a range of conceptual tools adequate to understand a range of practices and processes' concerning identities. According to Cerulo (1997: 385-409), 'many works have tended to refocus what obtained in the 1970s by shifting attention from the individual to the collective identities' (see also Vubo & Ngwa, 2001: 163-190; Durham, 2000: 113-120; Kunovich, 2006: 435-460; Harner, 2001: 660-680; Mokake, 2010: 71-80). While agreeing with Cerulo and others who belong to this school of thought, this thesis also examines different types of identity. Those who appropriated different technologies and moved in different directions assumed new identities which collectively integrated them into 'Komness'.

This thesis is not interested in identities *per se* but in the way Kom identity has developed in time and space with Kom people. Benedicta's story is quite revealing: It shows how she had changed. What primarily explains this change is her physical mobility made possible by her appropriation of schooling. She was one amongst a number of people to do so, and such people left Kom because of that schooling. It could be said that schooling determined her mobility and that of many others. Those who went to school belonged to a specific status. They were the ones who were able to appropriate this particular technology and therefore assume different identities and achieve positions of power in society (for more on power see Dowding, 1996; Di Gaetano & Klemanski, 1999; Chabal, 1994).

As already mentioned, some individuals achieved a new status not by schooling. They also became geographically mobile by relocating to the coastal Cameroons to work in the plantations. Some were able subsequently to buy farm land and employ wage labour. For example, Anyway Ndichia Timti went to the coast, acquired farmlands, cultivated cash crops, and saved money. Back in Kom he sponsored the construction of a school and paid teachers and pupils from his own pocket before handing over the school to the missionaries. He thus changed to another class and henceforth rose to a higher status – not because he had been to school but because he had promoted *kfaang* in a special way among his people. Many such cases could be found in Kom.

Those who went to school identified themselves with school which connected them to others who went to the coast and got to know each other.

Identity therefore seems to have gone with networks. Today, the term social networking suggests the results of fast moving technologies and services like weblogs, MySpace, or You Tube. Without doubt, the concept of social networks far predates these electronic technologies that have only enabled one new aspect of them. This thesis argues that a social network is a grouping or loosely connected web of individuals bound by one or more specific interests or interdependencies. Scholars like Breiger (2004), Lin (1999), Cook & Whitmeyer (1992) and Gargiulo & Benassi (1998) have already paved the way by studying these networks. Like them this thesis attempts to contribute towards the understanding of networks, in this case by studying how Kom peoples' mobility was achieved in a coordinated manner.

The Georgian novelist, Henry Fielding (1973: 218), once remarked that he depicted species and not individuals. While in the field we followed the people and their itineraries that together formed Kom society. Kom informants cited in this thesis were a representation of Kom geographical and social mobility. This thesis depicts not only individuals but also processes and the dynamics of a society. The individual however matters. Individual stories are significant but only when linked to the process and how they came to understand and perceive social change within their own society. The fundamental interest here is how the society has functioned over time and space with the focus on social change. This implies networks, changing social relations, as well as changing identities or changes of the self.

Finally, it should be noted that the appropriation of technology is generational. That fact has to do with history, power, wealth, and geographical and social mobility. Generational relations are reflected in the way the youth appropriated various technologies not available to the older generation (although the latter in turn had also appropriated various technologies when they were young). Consequently, the old and the young were interviewed. But it was the youth of their time who were most involved in the major geographical and social mobility characteristic of the period under consideration.

Structure of the thesis

This study comprises nine chapters. Chapter One introduces the study area, the recent social developments among the Kom people with respect to innovation, social change and mobility, and the conceptual issues of relevance. Chapter Two focuses on the various methods which were used in this work regarding archival research and oral history.

Chapter Three situates Kom in the global communication ecology. In order to understand local processes it is also important to locate them in a global setting. The chapter argues that within the context of global connections and interconnections Kom was an integral part, and these connections and resulting mobility existed long before the colonial period due to ecological, trade, kinship situations and the social, political and economic context in which Kom was located. The chapter also provides a chronological survey of Kom history from c. 1928 to 1998 and further argues that key social and economic processes produced social and political hierarchies which were disrupted, reinforced and or curtailed by colonialism. Through connection and interconnection Kom came into contact with distant places and cultures. This chapter examines how Kom identity as a geographical entity was constructed.

Chapters Four and Five deal with tangible technologies and their relationship to the geographical mobility of people. The crux of Chapter Four is the ‘road’ of newness (*ndzi kfaang*). It shows how road construction increased the geographical mobility of Kom people out of the region. It shows that the Fon participated in the construction of the road as the Native Authority (NA) of the region while the colonial authorities justified the construction of the road as necessary for exporting raw materials. The chapter describes how the construction of the road in Kom was accepted and interpreted by Kom people. At the end of 1959, Kom was at least linked to a motorable road. Did it mean the end of bridle paths? Or what were the immediate impacts of the motorable road on Kom and the mobility of its people?

In connection with questions in Chapter Four, Chapter Five examines the first motor vehicle (*afu,em a kfaang*) bought and owned by a Kom man in 1955. Not everybody could become a vehicle owner. How did this man and his family become a vehicle owner? No doubt because he was mobile, acquired farmlands in Kumba and employed farm labour. He therefore earned his money from some profitable occupation in the coast which enabled him to buy a car. How was the vehicle as technology ‘domesticated’ in Kom? What was the impact of the vehicle and how did it influence the emergence of new social hierarchies? This chapter argues that a ‘regime’ was developed around the vehicle as it did around technologies. By a regime we mean the various people who identified themselves with the vehicle owner and also those who were workers in the transportation business like drivers, motor boys, charterers and mechanics. Once the vehicle arrived, a new social class controlling mobility emerged.

If the motor vehicle was a tangible technology, the church was not. Chapters Six and Seven deal with the school and the church as technologies which led to identity and social hierarchy formation. Chapter Six discusses the introduction of the church (*ndo fiyini kfaang*), in c. 1928. It focuses on the church as a technology and examines the broad changes which resulted from it. What was the status of people who appropriated the church? How did the church as an institution influence their geographical and social mobility? The position of the Fon who negotiated the coming of the church to Kom forms part of the chapter. The church was therefore crucial to the formation of new social identities and belonging as well as new socio-political hierarchies in Kom. The chapter questions how the church contributed to geographical and social mobility, and how for some people geographical mobility brought long lasting changes.

Chapters Six and Seven form the core of this study. Chapter Seven discusses another form of technology namely, the school (*ndo ngwali kfaang*) and examines how some Kom people were able to appropriate that technology and how teachers, for example, became very mobile as a result of schooling. The chapter examines the story of Anyway Ndichia Timti who contributed to the construction of schools and paid teachers and pupils but who himself never went to school. They highlight his admiration for *kfaang* which he brought to his people. The chapter also shows how certain individuals were at the centre of societal change. The role of some of the first women who went to school and became teachers is also discussed. Finally, the two chapters show the creation of identity and belonging as a result of schooling.

Unlike Chapters Four to Seven in which technology is central to the discussion of mobility, Chapter Eight examines *kfaang*. It examines what newness meant to Kom people and also how Kom people adapted to the challenge of newness. The chapter is organised around the argument that when Kom people travelled away from home they came into contact with different environments, peoples and cultures. This began in

Kubou's compound in Bamenda which was more or less 'the gateway' to several other places. Some Kom went to Nkongsamba, others to the coastal region of Cameroon and to Yola in Northern Nigeria. The central argument in this chapter is how Kom people in their geographical mobility attempted to recreate Kom in diasporic spaces. In this connection, the ideas of culture, identity and belonging are quite central. Thus the chapter examines place as a product of social space because the people share identity. How were these people perceived by people back in Kom? In this section we realise how the mental 'maps' of Kom men and women were constantly changing. The section ends with a geographical map which shows the different places which Kom visited in the course of their geographical mobility. It illustrates an extreme case of identity and belonging and questions how real identities could be, using Kom as a case study.

Chapter Nine is the conclusion of the study. It synthesises the main conclusions of the thesis, showing how technology and mobility interact in the society producing different layers of hierarchies, identity and belonging to transform a particular society. It also attempts to resolve the puzzle of total change and 'kfaangness' which the thesis has sustained all along.

Background and methodology

Introduction

According to Thomas (2002: 272), 'the importance and significance of methodology lies in the fact that the issue of what is studied is intimately connected with the question of how it is studied'. This chapter discusses the methods employed in the research. A range of different sources was used in the completion of this study in the belief that historical sources contain a greater or lesser degree of subjective partiality. To achieve greater objectivity, a combination of sources and methods is necessary. These sources included materials found in the archives both in Cameroon and Europe, photographs and oral interviews. The chapter starts with the writer's own approach to the writing of history. Secondly, it situates the study area. Thirdly, it examines what has been written about the history of the Bamenda Grasslands and Kom.

Proposed history writing

The history that has been written here is a social history defined as the study of the changes in the patterns of daily life of a group of people with the emphasis on how the subjects of the study lived with respect to music, dance, marriage, architecture, family life and so on, and the changes occurring over a period of time. The focus of this type of history is to uncover patterns of continuity and change (Hobsbawm, 1971: 24; Ajayi, 1980: 33-40). The attempt here is to understand African history from the perspective of the daily lives of Africans, using Kom as an example; and specifically, how mobility and *kfaang* affected the daily lives of the Kom. One source of inspiration was the work of Stephen Ellis (2002: 25). At one point Ellis cites the celebrated British historian-philosopher, R.G. Collingwood, who maintained that 'the work of a historian is the effort to penetrate the thinking of those who were implicated in the events of the past'. Ellis concludes that '(...) perhaps, one should think less in terms of African history and more in terms of world history in which Africa has its part. All the labels on periods are *ex post facto* (...) Africa should not be thought of in terms of timelessness'. In other words, Ellis argues that there should be an attempt to present and date African histories according to the way the Africans themselves saw it. From that perspective, European periodisation with its terminology of interwar, post-war, post-independence, pre-colonial, modernisation, industrialization, colonial and post-colonial can often be simply irrelevant to the subject of study. Therefore, those terminologies will only occasionally

appear in this thesis. The overall ambition of such an approach is to contribute to the local history of the region (Harniet-Sievers, 2008).

In dealing with this type of history, we go nearer to the people without a public voice as opposed to those individuals who held the reins of power and were at one time at the centre of politics. This meant dealing with the 'voices of the voiceless' (Gam Nkwi, 2010), and writing the history by giving priority to the oral informants. Inspiration was also drawn from three scholars. First, Touraine (1974) whose concept of historicity is the ability of the community to provide an orientation and transform itself in the process, as well as his model of talking about a people's history as they see it. Second Harniet Sievers *et al.* (1997 and 2002), maintain that the history of the voiceless is an attempt to write the history from the perspective of non-officials. Drawing inspiration from Cohen (2004: 6), it was felt that 'the informants should speak for themselves'. Finally, Ranger (2000), Illiffe, (1987) and Feierman (1990) provide historians of Africa with a model of the kind of research that has to be done in Africa. They urge that in writing the history of the African continent it is important to use the sources actually found there, in particular oral tradition (Ranger, 2000). Here, an attempt has been made not only to use these sources but also to write a history which accords with the people's own testimony.

A brief description of the fieldwork region

The Fondom of Kom is located in the Bamenda Grasslands in the present-day North-west Region of Cameroon. It is the second largest Fondom, after Nso, in the Grasslands (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967: 33). Kom shares its eastern boundary with the kingdoms of Oku and Nso and the southern frontier with Kedjom Keku or Big Babanki and Ndop plain. Bafut is on the Western border while to the north is found Bum and Mmen.

Politics in the Bamenda Grasslands is dominated and organised around the Fondoms ruled by Fons. These Fondoms, in general, grew out of conquest and the politics of inclusion and exclusion through warfare which led to the subjection of weaker neighbours. They were dominated by political and social hierarchies based on kinship/kinship and lineages, on social and political status. Most studies have focused on the Fondoms and on the establishment of political hegemony through social organisations (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967; Rowlands, 1979; Dillon, 1990).

In terms of development, Kom and the other parts of the Bamenda Grasslands have not benefited much from government development projects. It has thus remained on the fringes of what Veena & Poole (2004: 1) call 'the margins of the state'. By that phrase they simply refer to areas which are often depicted as being neglected or subordinate, and that marginality is compounded by geography, economy, society and politics. The people of those areas also see themselves as neglected by the state. The contradiction of those marginal areas is that although the term 'marginal' might sometimes suggest 'cut off' or isolated, the people living in those areas have also been part of the state and geographical mobility links them to the affairs of the state although in a limited way (de Bruijn, 2010: 167-191). Kom Fondom is one example of such areas in the Bamenda Grasslands.

Kom Fondom is believed to have been founded about the mid-19th century. It includes sub-chiefdoms which were incorporated into Kom proper as 'vassal states' by

Map 2.1 The position of Kom in the Bamenda Grasslands of Cameroon

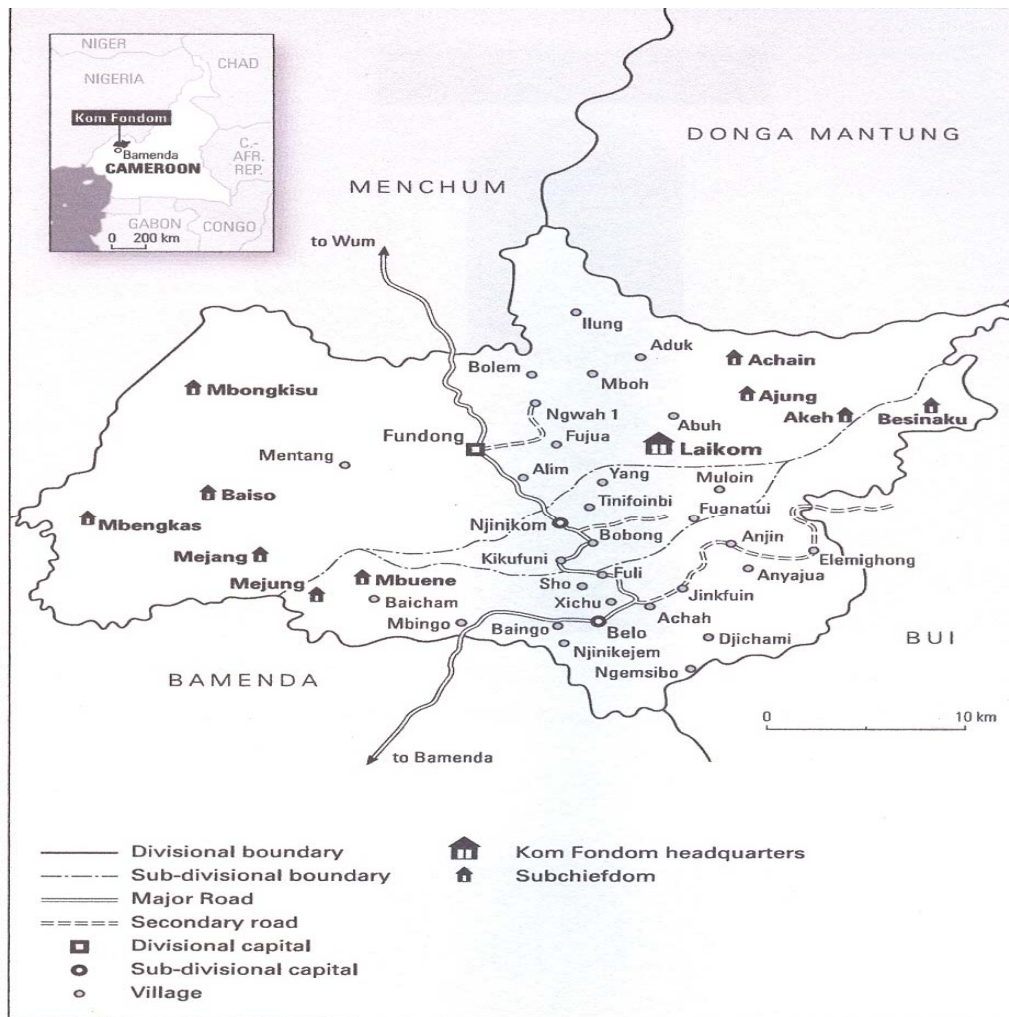


Source: Aaron S. Neba, 1987, *Modern Geography of the Republic of Cameroon*, 2nd ed. (Bamenda: Neba Publishers), 15.

Fon Yuh (c. 1865-1912), the seventh ruler of Kom. These tributary chiefdoms included Achain, Ake, Ajung, Mbesinaku, Mbueni, Baiso, Baicham, Mejang, Mbengkas & Mejung (Chilver, 1981: 457; Nkwi & Warnier, 1982: 65-68).

This study is concerned with Kom proper or central Kom, although reference will be occasionally made to the tributary chiefdoms that constitute the greater Fondom. Secondly, it considers Kom communities outside Kom, especially in Bamenda, which was the first place which Kom people expressed their 'Komness' beyond their area of origin. These communities were founded as a result of the spatial mobility of Kom people in their attempt to sustain 'Komness'. According to their oral traditions, the ancestors of the Kom migrated from Ndobu in North Cameroon with other Tikar groups, to Babessi where they settled temporarily. A popular legend recounts their movement from Babessi to their present settlement. It states that while Kom people were at Babessi, their presence was seen as threatening. The King of Babessi therefore devised a trick to eliminate them.

Map 2.2 Kom Fandom showing its villages and sub-chiefdoms



Source: Chilver & Kaberry, 1967, 'The Kingdom of Kom in West Cameroon', p. 126.

One day the king of Babessi told the Fon of Kom that some of their people were becoming obstinate and might cause a war between the two groups. He therefore proposed that they should each build a house in which the trouble makers would be burnt. The Fon of Kom, Muni, agreed to the plan and the houses were constructed accordingly. But while the king of Babessi constructed his house with two doors, the naive Muni built his own house according to what was agreed, with only one door. After locking the front doors, the houses were set ablaze. The Babessi people escaped through the second door while Kom people were burnt to death. This trick reduced the size of the Kom population in Babessi and made the Fon of Kom very angry.

Oral tradition further states that in his anger and frustration, Muni promised his remnant wives and sisters that he would avenge the death of his people. He told them that he would hang himself on a tree in a nearby forest and on that spot a lake would emerge and all the maggots from his decomposing body would *turn* into fish there. The lake was discovered by a Babessi hunter and immediately reported to the palace. A royal fishing expedition was organised. At the peak of the fishing the lake 'somer-

It was in Kom that the research ideas for this thesis matured. Clearly it was necessary to interrogate the sense of Kom geographical location and the cultural identity of its people. In a world of flexible and ever-increasing technologies of mobility and cultural encounters that is informed by what Gupta and Ferguson (1992) call ‘interconnecting local and global hierarchies’, cultural identities cannot be bounded and so the questions arose: where is Kom in this globalised world? Who are Kom people? Kom identity thus became a central concern. Was it more or less static over time? Or was it rather a political and social construction, a cultural identity as a work in progress? In this sense Kom cultural identity would therefore be fluid, an imagined reality, to borrow from Anderson (1983).

But on the face of it geographical Kom appeared to be bounded. Yet as the research progressed it appeared clearer that the location of Kom seemed more and more plural and that space was becoming difference. In other words, as Kom people moved out of Kom they recreated their home in distant places which was not the same as the original one because geographical space had changed. Yet they created social space. Writing about space as difference, Ferguson & Gupta (1992: 6-7) stated *inter alia*:

(...) there is need to give up naïve ideas of communities as literal entities, there is equally need to remain sensitive to the profound bifocality that characterises locally lived lives in a globally interconnected world, and the powerful role of place in the near view of lived experience. These changes notwithstanding, it would be wrong simply to dismiss space as imaginary, but quite constructive to focus on the ways in which space is imagined to explore the relation between place and space as socially constructed reality. Territoriality is thus reinscribed at just the point it threatens to be erased (...) Physical location and physical territory, for so long the only grid on which cultural difference could be mapped, need to be replaced (...).

In other words, because of the way the world has become interconnected, social scientists need to give up the notion that they are necessarily dealing with fixed, absolute physical spaces. In the past these ‘spaces’ have been used as the only measure of cultural practices and difference. Yet because the world is made up of movements of people in which it has become ‘globalised’, that type of naïve thinking needs to be given up.

Kom therefore was more complex as a ‘geographical expression’. Of course, it was in one sense a fixed geographically bounded place – but not only that. With that realization of Kom as also a social and political construct, it was necessary to give up pre-conceptions. We had fallen prey to that but after the first draft and continuous questioning we came to understand the contrary. To undertake a scientific enquiry it was incumbent to approach the research site as a neutral one rather than the other way round. When does one define the subject and object of his/her research? Should it be before, during or after the research? After the first draft it was realized that it is important to define the research place after the research. However, Kom and the Bamenda Grasslands had benefited from various studies in the past, and the next section will turn to the type of historiography and history which has been written so far.

Kom in the history and historiography of the Bamenda Grasslands

The story of Benedicta and other informants shows that very little existed in the historiography of Kom with regards to the way Kom people saw and understood their history. Thus, the masses were ignored. Indeed the historiography of Kom has been *a terra incognita*. It does not mean that nothing has been written on Kom but rather that Kom has not been at the centre-stage in historical research. Its history remains sketchily

written in articles, books and mimeographs. According to Vubo (2001: 112), a balanced study of any Grasslands community would be incomplete if it neglected Kom relations to other communities with which they formed what Kopytoff (1973: 371), calls an *ecumene*. Generally, Odhiambo (2004: 6) has informed us that the written sources of African history belong to three traditions:

The first corpus belongs to the Muslim sources from the eighth to the fifteen centuries and was mostly written by Islamic scholars, travellers and missionaries. The sources were generally biased in favour of Muslim rulers and communities and when they treated any unbelievers they condemned them.

The second corpus of written sources was dominated by European travellers and traders whose accounts of Africa dated from the fifteenth Century. They were not so different from the traditional representation of Africa. These European travellers portrayed Africa and Africans as primitive and always fighting against each other.

The third corpus consisted of colonial historiography produced essentially by the Europeans with their own knowledge of Africa. This colonial historiography was based on the premise of European superiority and a civilizing mission inspired by the evolutionary theory. According to the theory, Europeans were to bring civilization to those who did not have it. Colonial historiography therefore presented the Europeans as the actors in any significant transformation of the African continent. 'The Africans were seen by the administrators, missionaries, historians and the anthropologists alike as being static and primitive, the passive recipients of European "progress". Africa's self-evident achievement, its historic monuments, its polities that resembled Western states and its complex religious institutions were attributed to foreigners, the Hamitic conquerors of North East Africa' (Odhiambo, 2004: 6). It is this third tradition which fits the historiography of the Bamenda Grasslands and Kom.

The history of the Bamenda Grasslands was first written in ethnographic mimeographs by the first colonial anthropologists. They were employed to do so by the colonial regimes so that the people could be easily understood, pacified and governed. Some of these reports were grossly inadequate, some were misleading and yet others were described and understood in colonial language as 'primitive societies', 'natives', 'tribes', 'acephalous societies' or 'stateless societies'. By the middle of the 20th Century, the growing movements of people and state formation attracted a new breed of scholars. For instance, Rowlands (1979: 1-19) and Warnier (1984, 1993, 2007) attributed the movement and instability that was a major characteristic of the region to slave dealing in most of the nineteenth Century Grasslands. Their studies were limited in time scope only to the nineteenth century but they acted as pointers towards developments that were occurring within the larger development of the world capitalist economy. Their works also show that much mobility was experienced in the Bamenda Grasslands. This was principally because of trade – especially the slave trade – a point much reiterated by Kopytoff (1973) in his studies of Aghem.

Ekeh (1986) went further and attributed to the slave trade the integration of especially Sub-Saharan Africa into the world economy. Warnier (1984), demonstrates that underdevelopment did not start with industrial capitalism but that it is rooted in the origin of exchange itself in which the slave trade was prominent. Scholars like Chilver (1961 and 1963), Curtin & Vansina (1964) and Austen (1999) strongly support the view that the Bamenda Grasslands were linked to the Atlantic coast as early as the eighteenth century by the slave trade. This study is strongly influenced by these views especially because they question the globalisation myth according to which Africa has only re-

cently become part of the world system. The case of the Bamenda Grasslands and Kom only shows that the sub-region became part of global development, especially from at least the middle of the nineteenth century. It is also indirectly influenced by their views about early mobility of people in the sub-region.

Chilver (1966) notes how Zingtgraff wrote about Kom warriors who were prepared to fight in an instant. Bruens (1942), a Catholic missionary, published a description of the Kom language. 'The Structure of Nkom and its relations to the Bantu and Sudanic Languages' (Jeffreys, 1951) describes Kom and their traditions of origins. In 1952 he wrote about the Fon of Kom in 'Some Notes on the Fon of Bikom' in which he described the traditional hierarchy in Kom. In 1959 he commented on Kom again and focused on the blacksmiths and the origin and methods of smelting iron. In all these the authors have largely ignored the place of mobility in Kom. Implicitly, there were movements going on in the region as indicated by blacksmiths who had to sell their produce to neighbouring Fondoms.

Chilver (1961) examines some of the patterns of pre-colonial mobility in Kom, including those who were great traders, and travelled long distances for days and weeks. Kom people were the middlemen between Bum and Mankon and specialised in selling locally dyed cloth known today in the region as Bikom cloth. Chilver & Kaberry (1967), traced the origins of Kom expansion and Kom hegemony in the sub-region under Fon Yuh I. Jua (2002) examines the politics of Njinikom in relation to the village development association, Njinikom Area Development Association (NADA) and also showing how Kom became linked to the world capitalist system. Other scholars have dealt with the women's revolt which took place in Kom in 1958. (Ritzenthaler, 1960; Nkwi, 1976 and 1985; de Vries, 1998; Gam Nkwi, 2003). Others like Nkwi (1995) & Shanklin (1995) have studied slavery in Kom. The above works, although excellent, do not pursue the history of Kom from the perspective of mobility, technology and social hierarchies. This work therefore attempts to fill that gap.

Nkwi (1976) showed the dynamics of change in traditional Kom. Nkwi and Warnier (1982) surveyed the sources for historical reconstruction available in the Bamenda Grasslands and also the various indigenous groups found in the area and its socio-political organisation. Kom was treated in relation to its origin and migration to its present site. Nkwi (1982) examines how royal slaves and dynastic marriages were conducted in the Grasslands region during the pre-colonial period. He further illuminates the movements of people in the region. In (1989), he focused on the early German colonial rule in Cameroon and the effective establishment of Bamenda *Bezirk*. He also examines the Germano-Kom war of 1904-1905. Nkwi (1997), sketches the background – both national and local – to the establishment of NADA, its structure and its steady loss of grassroots support after 1990. All these works again indirectly touched on mobility. Their relevance to this thesis is not in doubt. The works shows how Kom and Grassland mobility was motivated by the developments in a larger world setting. Perhaps, understandably, these studies stop short of showing the link between ICTs and social hierarchies.

The works were generally framed against different backgrounds and were coloured by those backgrounds. They are the efforts of anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. After reading them one gets the impression that the scholars wrote from the position of those who wielded power. They dealt with those who handled power in traditional and colonial Kom society. Nkwi's work touched on Christianity, education, and movement of people in Kom but most, if not all his informants were elites in Kom

society. De Vries (1998) was also ‘enticed’ by working with informants whose voices had been loudly heard in scholarly debates. Above all, these attempts also stopped short of writing the history of the area according to the way the people themselves perceived and understood it.

These are only a few of the scholars who have done work in the Bamenda Grasslands. Their importance here is that they laid the foundation for future scholarship. If their works were of limited relevance for this study it was so because of their disciplines and the methodologies which they used. They were archaeologists, anthropologists and sociologists. Curtin & Vansina stood out as historians but the Bamenda Grasslands appear in their works only in passing. Generally, the history of the Grasslands has over the years received various types of attention as shown above. The mobility of people has been one of the frequent themes of that story as shown by Warnier and Rowlands. Yet it has not been a direct study by the above authors. Consequently, there has been no attempt before now to study in detail the interaction between mobility, technology and social hierarchies.

The scholars mentioned above only indirectly studied what has been directly examined in this thesis. Even when the work was anthropological there were some key informants who were never contacted during field work by these authors. Kom history has largely depended on anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists. This thesis has built on these anthropological works and has given it an historical perspective. Klein (1972: 16) informs us that ‘what defines the historian is the belief that things can be understood more fully if we understand how they came into being. Social phenomena are too important to be left to other social scientists’. Echoing Klein, to grasp social phenomenon fully, a combination of social science and history is needed.

Fieldwork: The archives in Cameroon and Europe

The National Archives, Buea (NAB), Cameroon

The NAB was established in 1959 through the efforts of two British Anthropologists: Edwin and Shirley Ardener. (For more documentation of this archive see, Orosz, 1996 & Austen, 1974). The archives building in Buea holds more than 20,000 files which are not stored in the best of conditions. Consequently, some of the files have been destroyed by rats as shown in the photo below.

Despite the fact that some of the files were destroyed, numerous files which were mostly written by the British Colonial Administration were consulted. They were: Assessment, Intelligence and Annual Reports of various administrative divisions submitted by Divisional Officers (DOs) to the office of the League of Nations and United Nations both on Kom and the Bamenda Grasslands. They touched on issues like roads, education, Christianity, and mobility and covered the period 1916-1961. However, for the years 1918-1948 there were more files because during that period the British colonial administration was being consolidated in the territory. The information was compiled by British authorities for administrative purposes.

Colonial classification of archives was an added hurdle. Their euro-centric language – ‘tribe’, ‘primitive’, to mention only a few of the terms – coloured most of the files because the sense remained to be deciphered by the reader (Stoler, 2009: 11). It was also difficult to decipher most if not all the abbreviations used in the files. That notwithstanding, on the whole it is worthy to note that the archival records remained one of



Photo 2.1 Destroyed files in the Buea archives [photo by author]



Photo 2.2 Bales of papers in the Bamenda provincial archives [photo by author]

the most useful bases for further investigation and analysis for this thesis. The importance of archival records was echoed by Williamson (2000: 1), for the Gold Coast. He maintained that, at both local and provincial districts, reports were essential since it was generally assumed that the colonial official was the first to keep written records for the specific area. It was therefore only in the keeping of records that subsequent administrators would have a sense of the territory. Although his focus was on the Gold Coast, Williamson also said what was true of the Gold Coast was also true of the British Cameroon. Records were vital for the colonial administrator at all levels, district, division and province, for effective administration.

The Bamenda provincial archives, Cameroon

The Bamenda Provincial Archive is found in the Bamenda Station. Most of the files appeared not classified as they were parcelled up and kept under the tables as shown in the photo below.

However, many files were consulted. These files had relevant information on road communication, tours and visits of the District Officers, Residents and messengers on and the growth of population in various divisions of the region including Kom

Personal papers collections, Cameroon

Personal or private archives as used here were not really archives in the strict sense that they were intended for future consultation and research. Generally 'private archives can occasionally provide the most extensive sources for research in local history although in some cases they might be symbols of prestige to the rich and powerful people' (Thomas, 1998: 429). This view seems to argue that private archives are kept only by the powerful and wealthy in society. But 'small' people at lower rungs of the society also have their 'archives', as this work will show.

Private archives, therefore are those created by individuals and are not opened to the public. They hosted mostly correspondence and letters which the individual had with colonial government, missionaries and friends. The strength of such archives is the fact that what is found there is not available elsewhere. Private archives include such collections as the parish archive in Njinikom, St. Anthony's School in Njinikom, and Chief Anyway Ndichia Timti's documents. The information they provide is useful since it is about the local situation. The content of the files includes such matters as the school attendance register, new Kom people who became teachers, the visitor reports and the constant transfer of the teachers and the pupils.

Mr. Anyway was one exceptional case of Kom people who had moved to the coastal plantations in the late 1940s. His papers were collected by his brother, Ivo Nkwain. While on the coast he admired western education although he had never been to school, and decided to open a school in his village, Fundong. In the previous chapter we narrated how the school was constructed in 1951 and in 1952 and that he paid the salary of the teachers and school fees of pupils. He also handed over the school to the missionaries but continued to help them financially. Missionaries compiled reports on how the money was spent. Chief Anyway wrote to the colonial education authorities urging them to open more schools in the Kom area. All the correspondence between him, the missionaries and colonial education authorities are found in his archives.

Parish archives, Njinikom, Cameroon

The Njinikom parish archives combines documents from the St. Anthony's Primary School Archives and the mission parish archives. These two institutions provided in-

formation about the local situation. The school and the church, all found in Njinikom, constitute technologies which were key factors in the geographical and social mobility of Kom people beginning in 1928. St. Anthony's Primary School archive contains information about various hierarchies and social mobility. It provides evidence about the number of Kom people, both females and males, who appropriated the school and those who became the pioneer teachers. They also showed how their access to schooling influenced their spatial and social mobility.

It cannot really be said that these archives are without problems. The 'sacred returns', files which contained the total number of catechumens and Christians found in a parish in a year which would have shown the number of catechumens and Christians found in the Njinikom mission, had been removed to Buea, which was the headquarters of the Vicariate before the creation of the Bamenda diocese in 1971. To consult these files in the archive in the Bishop's house, Small Soppo, Buea was a difficult task. The Bishop's secretary told me in a stern and firm manner that, 'It is the tradition of the church not to open her sacred returns to the public'.

Public Records Office (PRO), Kew Gardens, London

The PRO is the hub of British reports and correspondence within the British Empire and the Commonwealth. Kom as part of the British Southern Cameroons was part of the empire. Consequently, there were files on Kom and Bamenda Grasslands although they only covered limited time periods and themes. Most of them dated from the 1950s and dealt largely with political issues. But some of them dealt with transport, roads, and the presence of the Mill Hill missionaries.

The archival content reflected the views of the colonial and mission administrators. Despite their shortcomings and evident subjectivity, Whiteman (1983) has shown that the archives provide copious information.

Mission 21 Archives, Basel, Switzerland

The archives of Mission 21 of Basel Mission, Basel, contain historical photographs, written records, printed and hand-drawn maps. This collection was a very important resource for research in church history, social and cultural anthropology, geography, and environmental sciences. The photographs date from the early years to the middle of the 20th century, including 28,400 of the more digitally accessible. They were taken in the historical Basel Mission fields in Africa and Asia, with a principal focus on Ghana, Cameroon, South India (mainly Karnataka and Kerala), South China (mainly Hakka-speaking parts of the Guangdong province and Hong Kong), and Kalimantan.³

Most of the files in Mission 21 archives were in German and my knowledge of German was non-existent. Maps were consulted and the most important was the map of Bamenda Province in 1949 provided by Reto Bieri who worked in the cartographic section. The importance of the maps lay in the fact they showed both the footpaths and the motorable roads then in use. Secondly, the maps showed the various patterns of mobility in the entire Bamenda Grasslands.

Archival photographs

These photographs were collected when Presbyterian and Catholic missionaries first arrived in the Bamenda Grasslands. According to Jenkins & Geary (1985: 56-57), 'The photographs were a means of depicting the conditions encountered in foreign lands and

³ Discussion with Guy Thomas, Basel, 19 May 2008. He was the head of the archives.

were added to the annual mission station reports to illustrate the growth of the stations, the schools and the congregations. Above all, photos were taken to appear in the literature issued to supporters who were based at home'. In all, a total of 268 photographs showed how the early missionaries influenced mobility and technologies in the Bamenda Grasslands. They are important to this work because some of them captured the circumstances vividly and are identified with captions, dates and photographer's name.

Apart from the articles, and files there were also a collection of photographs both private and public, in the homes of informants.

Photographs from family albums

Some photographs have proved useful for this thesis. Photographs can tell more than words. Scholars like Hartman et al. (1998) and Pinney (2004) maintain that only recently have visual sources, especially photographs, become important tools as complements and alternatives to the written word. Kratz (1994) claims that the value of photographs is also determined by the fact that

Most researchers of Africa's social history have had limited interaction with photographs. Indeed until now the most common location of photographs in theses on Namibian and wider African history is on their covers. They might also have been included marginally within the text in order to provide a feel or atmosphere for the period, to identify a person or place, or simply because of their outright quaintness.

Thus, in the photographs found in family albums, on walls and tables, informants could be seen celebrating memories. They point to photographs showing when they were in Lagos, or in Bamenda or in Victoria with friends and relatives. As Edwards (2004: 4), points out, photographs were not disembodied images but rather inscriptions which relate to people, their sense of themselves and their past. Photographs therefore depict, by their very nature, social relations and the way in which people actually tell histories. In the contexts of telling stories, photographs as objects become enmeshed in the web of the oral, linked to sound, gesture, social body and music; sitting around, passing the photographs from one to another, perhaps in ways that express traditional social relations of history telling.

Family photo albums constitute one of the social repertoires in Cameroon but the use of these albums in the Bamenda Grasslands is quite intriguing. In Kom homes the first thing a visitor is given is a family album. In certain homes the photo albums are displayed on the walls of the sitting room. These albums have over the years escaped the attention of researchers at least in Kom and the Bamenda Grasslands. What is their importance? Why do the people conserve them? Could albums be sources of history? Who was behind the production of these photos? Where, when and why? What do these photos represent? These questions need further research.

One of the probable reasons for albums is that they show within a very short time the many years that have elapsed in people's lives, and make them nostalgic about their mobile past. Even their itineraries were reflected in these albums, as well as the new artefacts that accompanied their mobility. One could get a quicker sense of who somebody used to be a few years back or 'long ago'. Of course, family photo albums cannot tell a complete photo of somebody or something or a period. People tend to select what they want others to see and feel good about them. However, if carefully used, photos could be another source of history, despite the shortcomings, because they could identify the time and events surrounding its production (Geary, 1986: 89-116).

These photo albums were different from the photos that were obtained in the archives. The archival photos used in this thesis were ‘quiet photos’, meaning that you could not see and feel the people talk to you; hence the images could only be recognised through what was written about them. The photo albums in houses could be described by those who kept them. More often than not, albums and photos are seen as elite objects. In Kom, this is not the case. Photos are found almost in every home irrespective of status but not everybody was prepared to allow us made use of them. There were other things around the photographs which we could deduce from observation.

Photographs from informants also differed from those in the archives with regard to time-spans. Archival photographs portrayed the situation in the early 1920s. As already mentioned elsewhere most of the archival photographs were obtained from the Basel Mission 21 archives. While in Kom as much effort as possible was taken to view the private photo albums of the informants. Through the photographs more information was also captured on individuals who appropriated the technology. The first Kom photographer, Cosmas Nchouji, showed us the photo of the first car bought by a Kom man in 1955, and indicated that most of the people in the photograph had died. It was important to interview the widow of the man who bought the car. In our first meeting with her in February 2008 she turned down my request to talk to her about her late husband’s car. A second meeting in April 2008 was unsuccessful because she was seriously ill. In a third meeting in late June 2008 she told us the story of how her husband came to buy a car and the fascination and sensation it caused in Njinikom in June 1955. Unfortunately most of the people in the photograph except Michael Mbeng had long died.

The photographs revealed more than the narratives and archives. For example, they were a separate repository and source. They, like any other source had their limitations and ‘require just as much scrutiny and critical interpretation as written sources’ (Jenkins & Geary, 1985: 63). But photographs are also very compelling. They are force of command. They command the eye and create more sensations in the viewer than the written narrative. The last photographs used in this thesis were taken by the researcher to illustrate a point. Although amateurish as they are, they help to tell the story.

Notwithstanding the shortcomings, of the archives and photographs, their use in historical reconstruction is indispensable although it involves a critical reading of files and a careful examination of photographs. It is not an exaggeration to say that the biases in the content of files might sometimes lead us to wrong interpretations. The voices of most informants have been rarely represented in these files and sometimes when some are traced they are distorted, with some speaking, literally and figuratively, the language of the colonial power (see Cherniavsky, 1996: 85-110; Ergene, 1998: 29-43). This was particularly the case of those who attained elementary and formal education. In Kom social context they were those who appropriated the new technology and therefore formed a new social hierarchy. Women were absent and most of the time they were dismissed or only briefly mentioned in migration literature.

But it was important to know the role of these women in education, mobility, Christianity and ultimately in the social transformation of Kom. It is in an attempt to lean on these people that interviews became vital in the broadest way possible. This approach recalled Vansina’s (1989: xi) statement that: ‘it is no consolation to be told by others that, because there are no written records, no past can be recovered, as if living traces of that past were not part and parcel of daily life’.

Maps

We found the use of maps very helpful. Maps could be used to plot the itineraries of informants. They also aid understanding of social processes in time and space. Some maps again were secondary sources. A map offers a reader a visual dimension of analysis. One of its particular advantages is that it conveys non-linear and simultaneous knowledge. At a single glance a map, can tell what is going on in a particular region in time. Because of these compelling forces maps can be important sources for constructing the past (de Bruijn and Gam Nkwi, 2011 forthcoming). Since the central concern of this study was the relation between mobility patterns and the introduction of communication technologies over the past century in the Bamenda Grasslands with special focus on Kom, communication maps showing mobility itineraries were used to understand how they have influenced and shaped each other.

Fieldwork: Oral traditions in Kom

The importance of oral tradition, in societies without writing cannot be overemphasized. The information transmitted verbally fills the gaps in the archival sources. As Ki-Zerbo (1990: 3) points out,

Oral tradition takes its place as a real living museum, conserver and transmitter of the social and cultural creations stored up by people said to have no written records (...) Oral tradition is by far the most intimate of historical sources, the most rich, the one which is fullest of the sap of authenticity ... However useful the written record, it is bound to freeze, to dry up its subject. It decants, dissects, schematizes, and petrifies: the letter killeth. Tradition clothes things in the flesh and blood and colour, it gives blood to the skeleton of the past. It presents in three dimensions what is often crowded on to the two dimensional surface of a piece of paper.

Although Ki-Zerbo was so particular about oral tradition it should be noted that it has its own limitations which he was careful to point out. According to him, ‘this spoken history is a very frail thread (...) which we use to trace our way back through the dark twists of the labyrinth of time’. He added: ‘Those who are its custodians are hoary-headed old men with cracked voices, memories often dim, and a stickler’s insistence on etiquette as behoves potential ancestors’. He concluded that: ‘They are like the last remaining islets in a landscape that was once imposing and coherent, but which is now eroded, flattened and thrown into disorder by the sharp waves of modernity’ (Ki-Zerbo, 1990: 7). Vansina (1985: 199), often quoted as the doyen of African oral tradition, concludes his work by stating that ‘oral traditions have a part to play in the reconstruction of the past and that its importance varies according to place and time. It is a part similar to that played by written sources because both are messages from the past to the present, and messages are key elements in historical reconstruction’.

The importance of oral tradition confirmed throughout the interviews was obvious during the fieldwork. Even though oral tradition might be flawed just like written sources usually are, a combination of the two can yield significant evidence. Ryder (1970: 33) was aware of this problem. He remarked that, ‘Too often it is assumed that anything written must be more reliable than verbal testimony; but every historian knows that a written document needs to be subjected to exactly the same sort of scrutiny as to the circumstances in which it was produced as does a piece of oral evidence. The word of mouth is no more or less subject to distortion, deliberate or accidental, than the written word’. But the subjectivity of both sources does not mean that their respective value should be ignored.

Fieldwork for this thesis was preceded by research in the archives in Switzerland, England and Cameroon. This made it possible to identify the areas, persons and families to contact in the field. Two potential problems emerged: First to record as many variants of geographical and social mobility as possible and to fill in gaps in accounts already published. The availability of variants was cardinal to cross-checking and establishing credibility. In some parts of the thesis references have been made to this process in the footnotes. Secondly, archival work helped suggest the best sequence in which to interview informants.

Fieldwork:

Talking and interacting with people – Towards a historical ethnography⁴

The fieldwork experiences were fascinating and emotional. The choice of Kom as a research area was dictated by two reasons: the first one was that as an indigene, it was an added advantage to the researcher because it minimized the language barrier. Consequently, one could work directly with informants without interpretation or research assistant. Of course the focus on ethnographic research and its use of certain sociological methodologies did not provide a complete and accurate photo of societal transformation in Kom. Clearly, further historical research was indispensable.

But there was a negative part to this effort. On the other hand there was the suspicion of some of the informants. We were always moved by the fear of being rejected, whether the informant was the right one, or whether he or she was going to answer the questions. To overcome this, it was necessary first fully to integrate ourselves into the society. The research was a collaborative effort and the researcher was part of the community. The success depended so much on the community as well as the techniques. The researcher had only minimally spoken the language before. The interviewer made a point of helping out his informants in domestic chores during interviews. For instance, he helped to peel beans in the kitchens, thresh corn and do weeding on the coffee farms while sharing in the informants' stories of mobility.

In his piece 'Fishing in Troubles Waters (...)', Nyamnjoh (2005: 295-324) observed that one of the fieldwork methods which he used was talking and interacting with people. He wrote:

The ethnography used in this paper has been harvested as I went along, propelled by a fascination with the theme in question and a background of similar interests pursued among students and youth elsewhere in Cameroon and Botswana. Over twenty-five years of research have taught me this: if you are passionate about a theme and have a way with people, rich ethnographic insights flow your way through interactions with others anywhere, anytime. One is always doing fieldwork, even when not formally in the field. While confining social research to formal field situations might yield 'hard facts', it detracts from those realities that may not immediately fit our practised instruments and scholarly *manière de faire* (...).

Like Francis Nyamnjoh, this researcher realised that the more one talked with people about the work, the more it was enriched and the more the researcher was also directed to other people. So obsessed was the researcher with the work that he practically talked with almost everybody who seemed at all relevant to the study.

Njinikom became the base of the operations since most of the informants lived there. Its importance lay in the fact that the church, school, the motorable road and post office

⁴ Unless otherwise stated this information on this section was obtained from informants

first came through Njinikom. Most of the people who appropriated these technologies were from Njinikom and some were still alive and could remember their stories and friends with whom they once travelled. From discussions with them they directed me to their friends and relatives in other parts of Kom and beyond. Occasionally, the interviews were conducted out of Kom, in Bamenda or Buea when the researcher was directed to an informant.

Before the death of Prince Mbain, we had talked with him about chief Anyway Ndichia Timti after reading many files in the Buea archives concerning him. He directed me to Ngwaah, another village in Kom, where he once lived. While in Njinikom, we met Lambert Tosam and his elder brother, Isidore Tosam, both of Ngwaah and they knew Anyway. They directed us to his brother, Ivo Nkwain, who was now living at Wombong, 1.5 kilometres from Njinikom. Unfortunately, Anyway had died in 1965 in Victoria. He however gave me the biography of Anyway and his photo. He also opened a smoked wooden box containing Anyway's correspondence which he claimed he had never opened. This seemed to be an archive kept in the kitchen. As smoky as the box was, its contents were valuable. There were letters of Anyway with missionaries showing that he was paying the salaries of teachers and that he also contributed to the construction of many other schools in Kom area. Most importantly, Anyway was one of the role models of *kfaang*.⁵

The research interest was shared with Andreas Ngongbi, a friend and classmate in primary school, who directed me to his mother who had lived in Lagos in the 1940s but was back in Kom. Her mother granted me audience. During the interview, she spoke about the glamorous life in Lagos and how she travelled there. She said she met with other women in Lagos from Njinikom to whom she directed me. These women included Elizabeth Ngebo who lives at Mugoegoe, another quarter in Njinikom. Elizabeth did not only recount her experiences in Nigeria but also showed some of the things she brought home, like the umbrella which she used in Surelele Stadium when the Queen of England visited Nigeria in 1956 and part of the luggage which she had brought home from Nigeria. After the interview, she directed me to another friend, Grace Wuyum, whose husband worked with the military in Lagos.⁶

Mr. Paul Kiawi Tuh in Buea directed us to Peter Waindim alias Batacoss Abalah whom he remembered as the oldest long distance trader in Kom, living at Belo, another village in Kom. We met and interviewed him. He was a kind man, who narrated his long distance trade experiences with passion, affection and joy. He recounted how he used to travel by showing spears and other artefacts and currency used in the journey. Most of his contemporaries had died but the one he remembered who was still alive was Daniel Ntu, alias 'Bobe Yola', whom he directed me to meet. Like Peter Waindim, Daniel appeared relevant to the research because he was one of the long distance traders who had been to Bamenda Yola, Takum, Makurdi, Ibi, Port Harcourt, Kumba, Tiko and Onitsha.

Another informant, Bartholomew Nkwain, enabled us to understand better the geographical mobility of Kom people to the plantations in the 1950s in the Southwest region of Cameroon and the role of Vincent Freeboy Mukong as a recruiter of labour in

⁵ Some of his correspondence has been produced in Chapter Seven and the Appendix.

⁶ These people and their experiences although not exhaustively discussed in this study constitute the mould of women who represented those who were responsible in one way or the other for social transformation in Kom. They also became the 'new women'.

the 1950s. Bartholomew first went to the plantations with his other friends like William Ful and Linus Chah.

Jerome Ngeh Tim shared his experiences about the coast, including *salt wata* stories, one of the factors that attracted some Kom people to the coast. Their first encounters with the sea whose water is salty led to the phrase in pidgin language ‘*salt wata*’. Generally, the coast was claimed to be the origin of ‘newness’ because those who returned from the coast brought such things as metal buckets, dresses, and radios that were new to Kom at the time. All these enticed more Kom to the coast.

Target groups: Women, men and youths

Gender is an important dimension of this study. African women have not featured adequately in discourses on mobility. What was the role of women in mobility and social change in Kom? Were they both active and passive agents? It was important to talk with Kom women and hear their own voices and their itineraries. Although some women were guided by their husbands in those discourses, there were also some who were independently mobile and therefore deserved more attention. This was necessary to counter recent discourses on women’s migration which maintain that women always accompanied their husbands. Those who migrated alone were, according to Kom people, brave women.

The study of youths showed that they were always in the vanguard of those who appropriated new technologies. Increasingly, it appeared that they were the first to enter schools, become Christianised and migrate. They were actors and actresses and agents of change. Fuh (2009) showed how youths in the Old Town neighbourhood of Bamenda were entrepreneurs. In this study Kom youths were indeed found to be enterprising and were the first people to appropriate *kfaang*. During fieldwork, although now old, our informants were narrating their youthful experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to achieve three things. It has defined the kind of history which has been attempted in this thesis. It has also located the fieldwork region as well as examined the history and historiography of Bamenda Grasslands and Kom. The chapter ended with an exposition of the methods used during the fieldwork.

Generally, the photo has been a disjointed one. This is because some people who were central to events were not available, others had second hand information while others had forgotten and still some tended to exaggerate what happened, a situation common with oral history. Information from archives was not completely exhausted because the files were either unclassified or destroyed. In any case the testimonies were useful and constituted a huge contribution to the raw materials of the research. What has been produced in this thesis results from a combination of the several sources discussed above. With the discovery of several sources, some by accident like the photos, some by design, this thesis was written which two or three years ago could not have been produced.

Kom in global communication ecology, c. 1928 - c. 1998

Introduction

According to De Bruijn (2010: 167-168) the term ‘communication ecology’ simply refers to the interaction between the components that make communication possible and the possibilities that enable social relations, such as roads, cars, telephones, and the people who are part of it. This chapter has the following objectives: First, to describe the earliest phase in the development of communication in Kom. The question is how different technologies were able to take root in Kom. Writers such as Ferguson, 2006; Thornton, 1992; Eltis, 1993; Wallerstein, 1986 and 2002; Cooper, 2001, have shown how Africa had been part of the global processes with people and goods moving in both directions. Following that argument the chapter questions how Kom was part of the global processes which included the mobility of people and goods. What, for example, was the link between mobility, economy and trade? The other objective is to describe the political developments that changed the economy under colonialism, with a focus on increased mobility and technologies which came with the independence of Cameroon. How for example did these changes influence the birth of social hierarchies? In an attempt to answer the above questions, the chapter has been divided into the following sections: the creation and expansion of Kom, political leadership in Kom and the dynamics of geographical mobility, and the colonial and post colonial period.

The creation and expansion of Kom

The first Fon of Kom was Jinabo 1, son of Nandong.¹ At Laikom or Kom country three compounds were constructed which gave rise to three other clans, namely: *ekwu*, upper

¹ The following King list of Kom Fondom was compiled during fieldwork from knowledgeable informants and the present Fon. Nkwi's *Traditional Government and Social Change*, p. 81, was also useful but did not include the complete list.

Jinabo I	1730-1788	Ngam	1912-1926
Kumambong	1788-1800	Ndi	1926-1954
Nkuo	1800-1815	Lo'oh	1954-1966
Nkwain	1815-1830	Nsom Ngwe	1966-1974
Tufoyn	1830-1855	Jinabo II	1974-1989
Kimeng	1855-1865	Yibain	1989-1994
Yuh I	1865-1912	Yuh II	1994-present

compound which gave birth to the *ekwu* clan; *itinala*, lower compound which gave birth to the *intinalah* clan, and *achaf*, marshland which gave birth to the *achaf* clan. These compounds formed the nucleus of Kom Fandom, which was later expanded. According to Kom traditions some royals migrated out of Laikom and founded new settlements at Abuh, Njinikom, Yang and Alim. The possible reasons for this early expansion by mid-eighteenth century were population growth, and the desire for farmland and hunting grounds. Witches, wizards and other people who were ostracized from the settlement at Laikom also founded new settlements. Njinikom, which means, 'on the other side of Kom land' was one such settlement and is still considered a refuge for dissident exiles from Laikom.²

These early settlers at Laikom had displaced the aboriginal *Ndonalii* who later took refuge at Achain. Their first challenge came from an attack by the Mejang people. They had planned to attack and occupy Laikom when Kom men were on hunting expedition at Akeh but failed because Kom women disguised and dressed like men repulsed them. That victory was later followed up by the men who attacked Mejang at Mbam and displaced them. Thereafter, Fon Kumabong (c. 1785 - c. 1805), successor of Jinabo I, occupied Mbam (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982: 174).

Shortly after that event, Ngesbi, an *Itinala* Royal, founded Alim. Under him Alim became an autonomous Fandom with its own *nkwifoyn*, the executive arm of the traditional government. This was a threat not only to the central administration at Laikom but also to the unity of the Fandom. This threat ended during the reign of Nkwain who suppressed the Alim Fandom, seized its *nkwifoyn* and handed it over to Mbesinaku, which had become a vassal state of Kom. This transaction was intended to reinforce Kom authority over the area with Mbesinaku. Nkwain (1815-1830) captured many other areas.³

The nineteenth century was the height of Kom power as she fought with and displaced most of her neighbours. In the Belo 'valley', the first group to be displaced was the Nkwen, who were evicted out of Dzie-Nkwen. In c. 1845, the Kedjom people were expelled from Belo and took refuge in the southern part of Kom Fandom.⁴ Further south, smaller Fondoms were subjugated and brought under Kom control. These areas became vassals to Kom Fandom and included Baiso, Mbengkas, Mbueni and Mejang.⁵ Besides, their rich soils, suitable especially for oil palms and palm oil, the area also abounded with game which constituted part of the menu of the Kom palace. The animals included elephants, leopards and lions (Nkwi and Warnier, 1982: 178). In return Kom gave protection to these satellite groups against Bafut which also had an interest in conquering these areas. By the end of the nineteenth century, Kom Fandom had forty-two villages and ten 'vassal states'.

The population of these villages increased in the second decade of the twentieth century. According to the Colonial Assessment Report of Kom during this period the

² Interview with Prince Francis Chifukuin Ngam, about 88 years, 23 August 2008 Fundong, Kom. He is the son of Fon Ngam who reigned from 1912-1926.

³ Interview with His Royal Highness, Fon Vincent Yuh II of Kom, 88 years, Laikom, 15 June 2008.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ One way of reinforcing Kom hegemony over the vassal states was by allowing them to retain some of their traditional powers while exerting only minimal control through the collection of tributes. Some animals caught by hunters like leopards and lions were supposed to be carried to the Fon's palace at Laikom. Such animals caught in the vassal states were also taken to the Fon. In that way very little opposition to Kom hegemony came from the vassal states.

population increased from 5,570 in 1921 to 13,454 in 1928, recording a marked increase of 7,884.⁶ That increase was caused by the Fulani raids unleashed by the jihadists from the north of Cameroon who terrorised many groups in the Ndop plain, causing them to flee for safety into Kom. In describing that phenomenon, Nkwi and Warnier (1982: 82) assert that, 'groups of terror stricken people sought refuge in the hills where horses could not follow them or with more powerful neighbours'. These 'refugees' formed clans identifying themselves with their ethnic kin in Ndop plain such as Mbzihbah from Baba and Nggü from Babungo. Kom hospitality made the integration of these groups into their society easy. Security, unity and peace also attracted many people from neighbouring groups into Kom who distinguished themselves in the following clans – *Ambena, Ndowum, Ndokang, Ndo-Egayn, No-Wambong, Mejang* and *Ndo Nambang*.⁷

The territorial and demographic expansion of Kom was finally achieved by Fon Yuh 1 who ruled Kom from c. 1865 to 1912. Writing about Yuh's achievements, Chilver & Kaberry (1967: 33) stated:

After his accession Yuh transformed a loose area of influence into a well articulated kingdom which could attract adherents away from the Bafut sphere of influence (...) Yuh was consolidating a collection of villages in Kom proper, each with quite effective local political institutions and sub-chiefdoms of varied origin, such as Mejung, Mejang, Mbengkas, Achain and Ajung, when he was interrupted by the arrival of German administration.

Yuh not only give military protection to Mejang, Mejung, Baiso, Baicham and Mbengkas against Bafut harassment but also raided Bafut for 'slaves'. In that venture, Kom became the main provider of 'slaves' from the Grasslands to the middlemen trading with the coastal area (Chilver, 1962: 233-258 and 1967: 147-166).

After strengthening Kom hegemony in the south, Yuh turned to the northern part of Kom and attacked Din which is found in Bui Division today. Its ruler was captured and taken to the royal compound of Fuli and some of his people were handed over to the ruler of Mbesinaku. Din was temporarily placed under Akeh, one of the vassal states of Kom. Following the German colonisation of the Western Grasslands, Nso launched a protest against Kom's control of Din, and the Germans handed over the area to Nso probably because of the support which Nso gave the Germans during the Bamum war (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982: 176).

In its ambition to expand and acquire more human and natural resources, Kom attempted thrice to subdue Bum to no avail. She turned her attention to Mmen which successfully resisted the attack with the assistance of its Fungom ally. When the Germans arrived in 1889, Kom was preparing a major expedition on Fungom but that was foiled. By the end of the nineteenth century four northern states, Achain, Mbesinaku, Ake and Ajung, acknowledged Kom hegemony and became her vassals. Her superior military force explains the successes and expansion of Kom into foreign lands. The present boundaries of Kom owe much to the expansionist policies of Fon Yuh. The socio-political organisation of the Fondom has been well treated by de Vries (1998: 10-12), but only its most salient issues are relevant to our central theme. From the foregoing it is not an exaggeration to say that Kom in the nineteenth century was a polity created through co-option, inclusion and exclusion of other people.

The main economic activities of Kom were agriculture, local industry and trade. Agricultural production was mainly in the hands of the women who produced enough

⁶ File Ad/1928/24, Bamenda Division: Kom Assessment Report by G.V. Evans (NAB).

⁷ Ibid.

food for local needs. Men helped in the clearing of the farms. Crops cultivated included coco yams (*Colocasia Antiquorum*), yams (*Dioscorea Dumetorum*), native carrot (*Colinus Dazo*), sweet potatoes (*Ipomoea Batatas*), cassava (*Manihot Utilissima*), native spinach (*Solanum Nodiflorum*), okro (*Hibiscus Esculentus*), egusi (*Lagenaria Vulgaris*) and groundnuts (*Arachis Hypogea*). Maize was the staple diet and has remained the only crop that is cultivated twice a year.

Industry included the manufacturing of local crafts, carving and iron smelting. Local craft industries produced baskets, raffia bags, and mats. Specialised skills or talents were required for one to become a carver, an important profession in pre-colonial Kom. Carvers produced chairs, stools, door posts, masks, wooden bowls, mortars, pestles, staffs, camwood, mixing bowls and a wide range of local needs. Kom was prominent in carving and noted for a carving school. One of the most famous of these schools was founded and directed by Fon Yuh. This school produced the *Afo-a-Kom*, a wooden statue the size and height of a normal human being, one of the finest pieces of art in the Bamenda Grasslands. Fon Yuh assisted by some of his pupils, carved a group of four life-size Photos. All these Photos were looted from Kom palace in 1904 (Nkwi, 1976: 19 and Gam Nkwi, 2005: 134-155).

Political leadership in Kom

The organisation of the Kom Fondom was very hierarchical. At the apex of the Fondom's socio-political and economic affairs was the Fon whose powers were sacrosanct. His palace was on a hill top of Laikom, the traditional capital of Kom. He ruled the Fondom with the help and respect of his people and was 'surrounded with carefully guarded secrecy' (Nkwi, 1976: 11). His compound housed his wives, children, pages, guards and advisors. Some colonial and post colonial researchers and missionaries maintain that the Fon had hundreds of wives who helped to enhance his prestige (Reyer, 1953). He was respected with many praise and honorific names, *mbai* (Lord), *Lum Nyam* (The greatest creature), *cha-mufor* (Great Man, and *nyamabo* (leopard). He was both a secular and spiritual leader and in the words of G.V. Evans (1927), 'he was the be-all and the end-all' (Argenti, 2007). A British colonial report of 1927 went further and captured the power and prestige of the Fon in the following words:

The present chief of Bikom, Ngam, by name is tall, dignified man of imposing appearance and truly fits the phrase 'every inch a king'. He is 6 feet 4 inches in height and about 60 to 65 years of age ... He is undoubtedly of strong and forceful personality but also can be artful, cunning and suspicious. It is by the force of his personality that he rules his people with a firm hand, and it is greatly to his credit that since the British assumed civil administration in the Cameroons there has been no real and untoward incidents occurring in his chiefdom except minor ones which were easy of settlement. Nothing is done in Bikom without his express command and he takes a real and active interest in the welfare of his subjects. At one time when the assessor of this report was in the field asking for eggs to buy at one hamlet, the head of the hamlet said that the eggs that were left were for the chief.⁸

The report shows that the Fon of Kom was the true and undisputed leader of his 'state'.

Diviners of the Fondom who were in constant contact with the spirit world were expected to initiate the new Fon into this new role. In this connection, Nkwi notes that,

⁸ Report by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Administration of Cameroons under United Kingdom Trusteeship for the year 1951, 23-24, (PRO).

‘the Fon was believed to be able to transform into a diviner or a man of four eyes’ (Nkwi, 1976: 57). It was only after this initiation that the new Fon was believed to have acquired spiritual powers. It was also believed that this initiation prepared him to dispense justice fairly, without fear, and to protect his country from all evil forces that might threaten its existence. With these powers, there was no challenge to royal prerogatives in pre-colonial Kom. His authority over all the ‘vassal states’ was unquestionable. He was closely guided by the *nkwifoyn*, the executive arm of the traditional government. It checked the excesses of the Fon and the Fon also checked the excesses of *nkwifoyn*. The village heads and palace notables made up the *nkwifoyn*. This promoted checks and balances in government.

In the villages, forty-two in number, the Fon was assisted in the discharge of his duties by the village heads called *bonteh*. The *ibonteh* (village heads pl.; *bonteh* sing.) was the founder of the village. He was the representative of the Fon and reported anything that could threaten the peace. He also executed the orders of the Fon and *nkwifoyn* in his village, maintained law and order. Although most village heads did not owe their office to the Fon, all were required to present themselves and pay allegiance to him as soon as they were installed heads by *nkwifoyn*.

Government of the Fondoms was sustained by many segments of people, and de Vries (1998: 11) describes the various roles as follows:

An important role at the palace was fulfilled by a variety of pages, retainers and messengers. There were various positions within these ranks, but for the sake of simplicity the whole of the fon’s male servants and assistants will be referred to here as *chindas*. Most *chindas* entered the fon’s service between the ages of 7 and 14 years. Service to the fon generally lasted between six and eighteen years. At the palace, *chindas* were trained to carry out a variety of duties, ranging from annual labour to advising the fon (...) *Chindas* were trained in strict discipline, obedience docility and loyalty and sworn to secrecy. Service to the fon was compulsory and unpopular (...).

The work of the *chindas* was not always as unpopular as de Vries claims. Some *chindas* enjoyed working and being near the Fon. Many liked the job because when they reached the age of retirement, which was approximately 18 years of loyal service in the palace, they received benefits from the Fon which included two wives. Reporting in 1927, the District Officer, G.V. Evans, claimed rightly that ‘a *chinda* is the conscience of the chief and must share his most intimate secrets, and it is essential that he must be to the chief, a man of integrity and loyalty according to their lights’.⁹

The geographical expansion which led to the founding of Kom also led to the mobility and dispersion of many people before the Fondom consolidated its position in the Grasslands of Cameroon. According to Beck (2003: 643), the social hierarchy of Kom or any Fondom is characterised by the manner in which authority is delegated or shared between the apex or regional chief and the community leaders. Chiefly authority may be ceded from the local level chiefs upward to the village quarter heads or delegated from the regional downward to village level leaders. This addresses variations in the administrative power structures of many Fondoms in the Bamenda Grasslands and Kom is a typical example.

The power of the Fon in particular played a major role in introducing technologies to Kom. He negotiated his position in order to allow the missionaries to settle in it. This

⁹ File Ad2 59/26 Bikom Assessment Report (NAB). While in the field I met some retired *chindas* who spoke proudly of the job and I concluded that de Vries’s opinion that the job was not popular showed the contrary.

could be explained by the fact that the Fon was aware of the changing times. In this regard he was prepared to 'swim with the tide' by embracing change. If Kom had remained 'powerful' today in terms of technologies like the school, church and roads, this is due to the way the Fon negotiated his status. Governance and negotiation therefore were of prime importance to the settling of the church and school in Kom. The Fon of Nso did so earlier at a time when Fon Ngam (1912-1928) of Kom resisted Christianity until his death in 1926. Fon Ndi was more receptive to western education and Christianity and so 'stooped to conquer', meaning that he had to submerge his authority in order to make any meaningful gains from the new technologies. One continuing ambiguity for Kom was that on the one hand it was a remote region but on the other a technological 'hub'.

Governance and negotiation were later echoed in the attitude of another Fon in the Bamenda Grasslands. Writing his autobiography, Fo Angwafor (2009: 41), the paramount Fon of Mankon said *inter alia*:

To maintain ourselves as embodiments of the particular cultural communities we head, we have had to dance to the tunes of changing times, constantly having to negotiate our positions within the contradictions between state and our communities on the one hand, and in relation to competing expectations within the communities on the other. Was it not Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian novelist whose books are well oiled with proverbs, who made a bird to say, since men have learnt to shoot without missing, I have learnt to fly without perching? Changing times for me and my colleagues have meant the ability to evaluate constantly and negotiate various innovations on the landscape of our politics and societies. We cannot afford to perch or rest on our laurels, lest we are swept away by the tides of change.

In other words, Fons were able to calculate what benefits they could win for their people with changing times rather than hold tight to the status quo.

Other Fondoms whose Fons did not negotiate their positions but rather resisted Christianity are still lagging behind technologically. They have not experienced the social changes similar to Kom and Nso. These Fondoms include Babal, Bafanji and Balikumbat. The role of the Fon was therefore very decisive because he had to negotiate his position before accepting these investments in technology like the church and roads.

The dynamics of geographical mobility

Land tenure

One of the factors motivating geographical mobility is land tenure. The Bamenda Grasslands seem to have an acute problem with fertile land due to an ever-increasing population. In Kom, the Fon is in theory the owner of all land. He leases out the land to lineage heads and quarter heads who are related to royal families. These royal families are *Ikui*, *Itinala* and *Achaf* which are believed to have been the founding families of Kom. There are also many families in Kom which were co-opted during the wars of conquest and others voluntarily moved into Kom. For such families, access to land is restricted, and the system of land tenure disadvantageous. Consequently, many who belonged to these 'have-not' groups and lack access to land prefer to move out of the region in search of greener pastures (Belinga, 2005: 61-62). This does not mean that members of the royal families were not mobile; rather the cause of their mobility was not linked to land scarcity.

Another factor is that the population of Kom has been growing while land is scarce. Available archival reports indicate that the population of Kom has been increasing as follows:

Table 3.1 Population figures of Kom between 1928 and 1968

Year	Population
1928	13,454
1938	22,339
1948	28,805
1958	38,560
1968	44,400 ¹⁰

Further, according to the 1976 census, Kom had a population of over 88,000. Ten years later (1987) the population had risen to 148,400.¹¹ As at 1998, Njinikom alone had a population of over 150,000 people.¹² The founding of Kom as we have observed indicates that in their geographical mobility they intermingled with and assimilated many other peoples. Even when they settled at Laikom they engaged in wars of expansion which led to the addition of several non-Kom populations.

Indigenous industry and the colonial situation

The northwestern Grasslands of Cameroon as a whole were an important iron smelting region. Iron smelting has been going on for about fifteen centuries in the region. Nkwi & Warnier (1982: 47) and Fowler (1995: 53-79) have shown that the iron industry was one of the biggest in Africa, judging by the number of workshops and the average yearly output computed from the volume of the debris that could still be seen. Pre-colonial Kom was an important iron smelting centre in the Bamenda Grasslands. In 1889, Zintgraff described Kom as a 'region of charcoal-burning and iron industry' (Chilver, 1966: 19 and Jeffreys, 1952). Iron smelting produced hoes, pick axes, cutlasses, knives and gongs. The most popular iron foundries were at Abu, Elimewong, Laikom, Belo and Njinikom. In 1927 when the D.O., G.V. Evans conducted an assessment of the Kom area, there were twenty-two established blacksmiths.¹³ The Fon owned one of the largest foundries and when the British began road construction, the Fon's blacksmiths made most of the hoes that were needed. The *nkwifoyn's*¹⁴ large gongs, three feet high, were produced from these foundries.

It seems that one of the objectives of the census by Evans was to discourage the local craft and industries. The colonial policy was designed to encourage production only for local markets. A British colonial report did not mince words.¹⁵ Among other things it said:

¹⁰ These population statistics were compiled from files in the Buea and Mission 21 archives. Except otherwise stated most of the files used here were consulted in the National Archives Buea. See File Ab/1928/24, Bamenda Division: Kom Assessment Report by G.V.Evans; File E-10-54AA-Ethnologisches inbor die Grassland-Stamme (Mission 21 Archives, Basel, Switzerland); File cb/1938/1, Bamenda Division Annual Reports for 1938; File cb/1949/1, Bamenda Annual Reports for 1949, 1950 and 1951; File cb/1958/1, Annual Report, Bamenda Division; File Ab/90, Cameroons Under United Kingdom Administration Report for 1959 and File Ci 1966/1, Economic and Political Reports, Menchum Division, 1966-1972.

¹¹ File NW/Qa/a.2001/1, Demography and Administration of the North West Province (Bamenda Provincial Archives). Provinces were change into regions in 2009 following a Presidential Decree.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Evans, Bikom assessment report, (NAB).

¹⁴ For more see File No. Ia 1926/1 Nkwifon society, 1926 (NAB).

¹⁵ CO 583/262/5, Local Production and Local Industries - Development of (PRO).

(...) It is probably true that the natives have not been encouraged to develop large handicraft industries for export because such exports would compete with similar industries in the United Kingdom. You always have to remember that there is a reason for owning a colony. I should not develop this theme for fear of being undiplomatic: I will say this much that the hard-boiled principle of running a colony is to develop it only in the sense that you develop its production and export of raw materials. Don't allow any outside capital to be put into developing colonial industries because in many cases they will compete too successfully with mother-country industries. Every finished article must be imported into the colony from the mother country, with the exception of certain things which it is not advantageous to ship to the colony – such as wicker furniture, ginger ale and such things, which would take up cargo space which can be better occupied by more expensive things. One illustration from my experience is chutney. In spite of the fact that all ingredients for chutney are, or can be produced in Nigeria, not one ounce of it is manufactured here. Instead, the materials are shipped to England for manufacture by British home industry, and the finished product exported – some of it back to Nigeria (...).¹⁶

This statement reflects the scepticism of a colonial officer. Instead of encouraging indigenous initiatives and industry, colonial policy feared it and sought to suppress it in devious ways.

Geography and mobility

De Bruijn & van Dijk (1995) and De Bruijn et al. (2005) linked environment and mobility in Central Mali. They also maintained that the natural environment also influenced human activities. Their works resonates in Kom. Kom occupied a high mountain terrain with an average height of 5000 feet above sea level and its capital, Laikom, perches on a spur of 6,324 feet higher. Kom has a surface area of 280 square miles. The landscape is extremely rugged and broken by rivers. The valleys that separate the spurs, divide the area into three large settled areas namely: Belo, Njinikom and Fundong. However, there are some low-lying areas found in the southern sector of Kom around Mbongkisu, Mughom, Mbengkas, Baiso, Mbueni and Ba-Nyam. These areas are fertile, with alluvial deposits brought down by rivers from the north. Fertile soils are also found in the valleys but generally the soils on hills are subject to leaching and are very poor owing to intense erosion facilitated by the heavy rainfall of between 1,300 mm and 1,400 mm annually. These soils have also affected the vegetation and ultimately the livelihood of Kom people (Takang, 1988 and Ghangha, 1988).

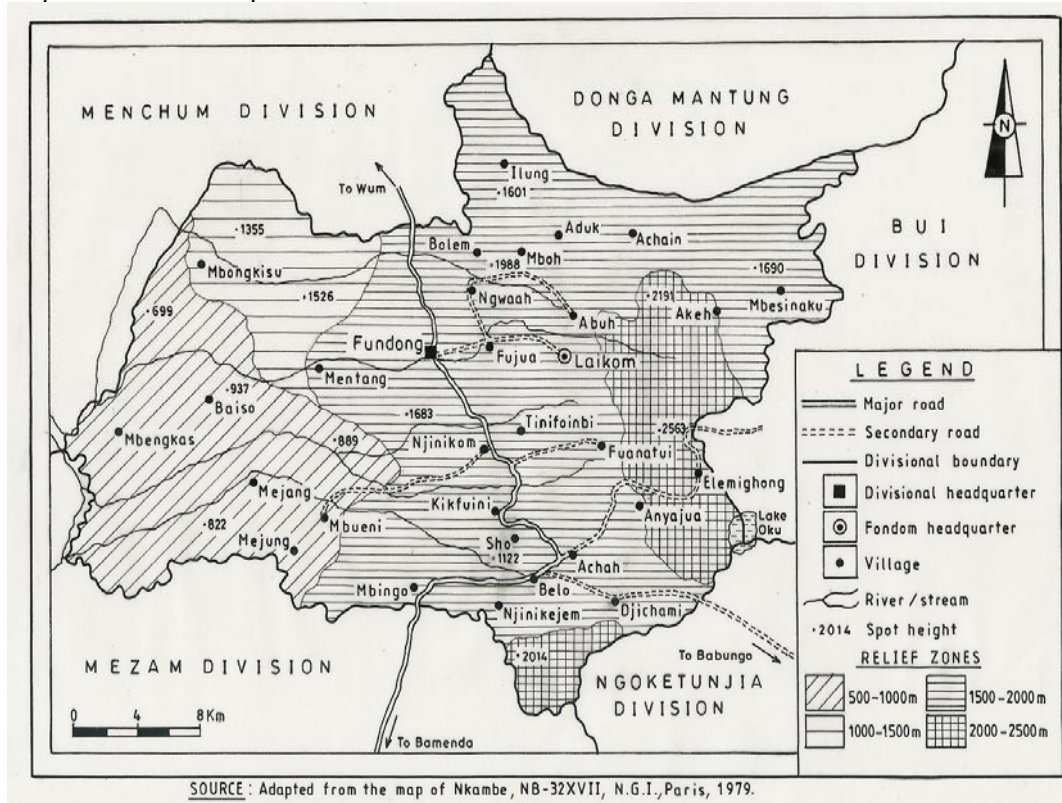
The first areas to be settled were generally the rugged hill slopes and elevated plateau, which provide enough security from attack. This explains why the southern region with fertile soil and game, remained sparsely settled because of a potential attack from Bafut (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967: 131). Overall, it is fundamental to note that most of Kom country was hilly and rugged. Consequently, such topography did not favour any meaningful farming activity and could not also sustain the growing population. Kom people therefore mostly migrated in search of 'greener pastures' out of Kom.

Trade and mobility

The connection between trade and mobility is well-known to students of Africa. This has been widely noticed by African scholars. For instance, Dike (1956) in his *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* has shown how through trade the Niger Delta was peopled by waves of migrants. Curtin (1972), wrote a critique of the slave trade which was

¹⁶ Ibid.

Map 3.1 Relief map of Kom



Source: Adapted from the map of Nkambe, NB-32XVII, NGI, Paris, 1979.

essentially and ultimately about trade and mobility. In similar vein, Meillassoux (1971) established the connection between markets and indigenous trade in West Africa. Zeleza (2003) has shown how pre-colonial trade was conducted in North, West, South and Central Africa and the nodal points as well as goods which were traded. All of these studies, directly or indirectly link trade and migration in Africa. Andersson (2006: 375-397) has shown how the trade led to the migration of people from the Mzimba district of Malawi and how the traders were responsible for bringing in South African goods into Malawi. Van der Laan (1992: 531-547) traced how trade led to the migration of Lebanese traders to the West African coast. Eades (1993) did similar work on enterprising Yoruba traders from Western Nigeria who established successful trading networks throughout the Gold Coast. In a similar way, Pfaff (2007: 61-88) has demonstrated how she followed two Zanzibari traders on their journeys. Traders were more active in spatial mobility than the other communities.

Trade in the Bamenda Grasslands and Kom was one of the main factors which influenced geographical mobility of people. Chilver (1961: 233-258), Warnier (1980a: 79-92), Kopytoff (1981: 371-382) and Rowlands (1979: 1-19) studied the region with regards to trade and migration. In Kom, although agriculture was the mainstay of the economy, trade also played an important role in the movements of Kom people. This trade was regional and long distance. Kom served as the bulk-breaking and transit points for the kola nut trade which was imported from Bali and Barfuchu and exported to Northern Nigeria. It was 'a funnel to a larger region that included the Ndop plain and

Nso' (Kopytoff, 1981: 374). As early as 1927 the D.O. for Bamenda, G.V. Evans, compiled statistics of both farmers and traders in eight Kom settlements. Table 3.2 presents the statistics. It shows the number of Kom traders and farmers in 1927. From the figures, people from Fuanantui, Abuh, Fundong, Yang, Njinikom and Belo were more involved in trading than those of any other village. That was indicative of the fact that these people were more active in spatial mobility than the other settlements.

Table 3.2 Farmers and traders in eight Kom settlements in 1927

	Total population	Farmers	Traders
Belo	729	141	9
Anyajua	791	98	12
Njinikom	1307	103	131
Fuanantui	1655	257	198
Yang	469	121	3
Mbaw	338	74	7
Abu	544	122	–
Fundong	583	122	–

Source File No. Ad/2, (1927) Bikom Assessment Report (NAB)

Kom people traded in kola nuts, iron products guns, kernels, salt, tobacco livestock and household goods. What is important in trade is that the traders recruited porters for long and short distance trade. On the average a trader could recruit as many as thirty to forty-five porters depending on the volume of the trade he was transacting. Trade engendered 'social stratification with a new social group emerging: merchants with large compounds and large numbers of wives' (de Vries, 1998: 10). According to the Bamenda Divisional Report, '(...) the Bikoms buy kernels from the Wum area, take them to Nkongsamba and returned with salt, cloth and tobacco for sale in their own country. Kolanut are cultivated in Bikom in small quantity but much is bought in Bali and Barforchu and then taken to Ibi, Kentu, Takum and Yola and the Adamawa area'. One report shows that the popular destinations of these traders were Wum and Nkongsamba and then onto Yola, Kentu, Takum and Ibi. The price of kolas varied from year to year.¹⁷

The greatest traders were Lucas Tosam, Missa Yong, Malawa Fuka, Danial Ayeah, Christopher Chiakeh, Paul Funjom, Stephen Mukalla, Marcus Ayong, Ndifon Awoh, Sixtus Jum, Babele Nkwain, Pius Timaneng, Jeremiah Nchamngui, Fallaman Nyongo, Nsanga Abola, Bama Ngesgui, Chiambah Bintum, Augustine Bainsi & Phillip Munteh. These traders came from Njinikom, Fuanantui, Fundong, Anjin, Belo and Anyajua. Apart from trading and mobility, it appears that much wealth was generated through trade and its usage was quite visible. In terms of conspicuous consumption, traders were among the first people to build new big houses of stones and zinc. They were the first to build large compounds, marry many wives, had many children and introduced new things into Kom. These traders were further knighted by the Fon of Kom after their heroic journeys and also because of the fanciful things which they introduced to the Fondom like aladdin lamps, clothes and whisky.¹⁸

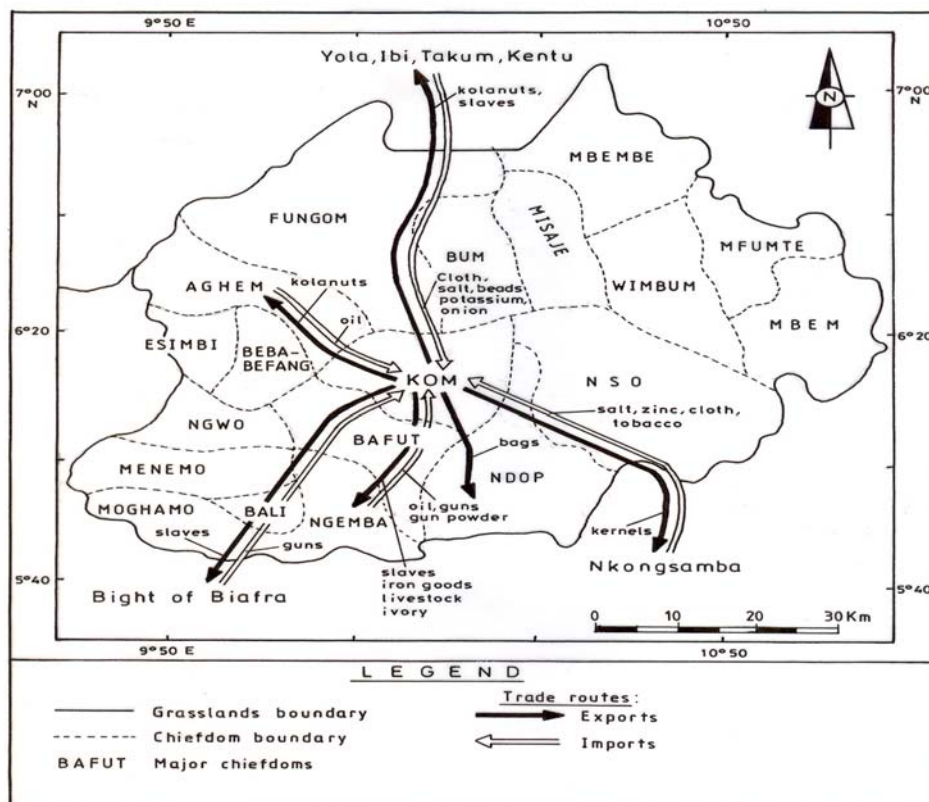
¹⁷ File No. Cb 1924/3 Bamenda Divisional Annual Report 1924-1927 (NAB).

¹⁸ Interview with his Royal Highness Fon Vincent Yuh of Kom, Laikom, 18 June 2008.

One sub-social group (hierarchy), which emerged as a result of trade, might be called 'apprentices' or 'boy boy'. These were young men who served a renowned trader for several years, accumulated enough capital and then began their own business. In certain quarters some of the apprentices became part of the 'family' of the trader. An example was Godfrey Chongwain. He was born in c. 1919 and at 21 (1940), he started serving Stephen Mukalla, a long distance trader. Godfrey accompanied Stephen to Nkongsamba, Victoria, Tiko, Kumba, Takum, Yola, Ibi and Onitsha. Besides, he ran errands for Stephen. He lived in Mukalla's compound until he got married to Thecla Fukuin Yuh in 1946. After their wedding they gave birth to their first son, Christopher Chongwain in 1950, in Mukalla's compound. Godfrey then started his own business and constructed his compound in 1965 of stones and zinc, although small in size as compared to the compound of Mukalla.¹⁹ These types of houses were a novelty in Kom architecture and were constructed by *kfaang* men.

The Report of Evans also showed that Kom traders trekked as far as Nkongsamba, a journey of 109 miles, which took nine days, and as far as to Yola, which took 62 days.²⁰ They travelled in caravans and one caravan could be as many as 65 people including

Map 3.2 The Bamenda Grasslands showing trade routes used by Kom traders



Source Adapted from Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy*, p. 175 and oral sources

¹⁹ Interview with Godfrey Chongwain, Wombong, 14 March 2009. He died on 8 June 2010.

²⁰ File No.Ba (1922)2 Report for the League of Nations 1922. Report on the Bamenda Division of Cameroons Province for the League of Nations by Mr. W.E.Hunt, District Officer (NAB).

carriers and guards. Peter Kehmneki was one of the short distance and long distance petty traders. He was born at Anyajua, Kom in c. 1908 and was not educated in the western sense of the word. Initially, he was a petty trader selling clay pots and groundnuts bought at Babungo, a neighbouring Fondom, and sold them at the old market near Belo. Regarding his experience in long distance trade he said:

My first long trip out of Kom was to sell potatoes and hides and skins at Adeima, Nigeria. After this I made my first trip down to the coast where I experimented with farming rice at Kombone in Kumba. After farming the rice and earning enough money I started going to Calabar, buying second hand dresses after the Second World War and selling back in Kumba, Tiko and Kom. After sometime I abandoned the second hand clothes and started buying new clothes at Onitsha and Aba in Nigeria. This again did not satisfy me as I went into the Kolanut trade which I was buying from Bali and selling at Yola (...) From that I went into the business of selling zinc, salt and nails and some items as you can see all around the store here (...) Before Belo could ever know about trading I was already advanced in the trade with a working capital amounting to 100 pounds. Now I sell only robes which I started doing with my late friend Bobe Songji. In Belo, my friends whom we used to go out were: Babele Nkwain; Pius Timaneng; Jeremiah Nchamngui; Bama Ngesgui; Chiambah Bintuum; Nsanga Abola and Fallaman Nyongou. Each one of us had a gang of porters of about 20 porters. During the treks everybody had a role according to his age. The person who was young fetched water, the elder cooked fufu corn and the children fetched firewood. A caravan of 15 needed three pots of fufu corn prepared for five people (...) Children were very important. They were in charge of kindling and rekindling the fire which kept the pots boiling. Once the water was ready, the elderly people like me would take over the pot. Children could not do it because the pots were special and only the elderly could cook with them because they lacked the skill the pot will 'somersault'. We also had guards who were to protect us from attacks (...).²¹

From his account we gather how long distance trade was organized and that there were about twenty carriers in his caravan. Long-distance trade supplied Kom with *kfaang* things like zinc, salt, clothes and rice. The participation of youths in the long distance trade and in the Bamenda Grasslands has been studied by various scholars. Warnier (2006: 93-98 and 1993) showed the role of the youths in the trade between the Grasslands and the Coast. He claims that during the colonial period the Grasslands chiefdoms 'evolved a working ethos which was strongly embodied by the young men and women of these chiefdoms'. Curtin (1971: 266-281) has also illustrated the place of youths in pre-colonial trading networks. Kahjum (2009), using the concept of bush trade, showed how the youths were in the vanguard of the Cameroon-Nigerian border trade which provided various types of goods for Cameroon societies.

Porters carried goods as varied as kola nuts, poultry and livestock only to name a few. One of the carriers was Henry Foinkijem who was born at Njinikom in 1932. He attended St. Anthony's School Njinikom for two years. He trekked twice to Adeima (Adamawa) and Mebeilawa (Mambilla) in Northern Nigeria, and on both trips he went with a different trader. He recalls that at one time:

(...) one trader whose names I forgot came from Babanki and beg me from my uncle. He wanted me to accompany him to Nigeria with kolanuts. My uncle left for my father where he took permission. My father accepted and this trader gave me five hundred kolanuts for me to carry. I was to follow this trader to Nigeria. Apart from the kolanuts, there was a mat and corn powder with some dry fire wood which was to act as my food. The load was quite heavy and in a caravan of fifteen I was out walked by 2 kilometres by the other people. My colleagues had to wait for me. By the time I met them the first question was whether I will cope with the journey. I protested that the load should be reduced and it was done. The corn powder was reduced and I was asked whether I could manage the load. I said yes but added that until we enter Nigeria, nothing should ever be added. We trekked for one month to

²¹ Interview with Peter Kehmneki, Anyajua, Kom, 100 years, 26 and 29 August 2008.

and from Northern Nigeria. We sold the kolanuts and then I had a very serious attack of headache. After I recovered from the headache potassium and onion was bought and that was all what I carried back to Kom.

At Bum an incident occurred which I will never forget. We were about to cross a very big river which had no bridge. On crossing I slipped and fell into the river and soaked the potassium in water. Potassium does not like water. There my master did not conceal his anger; he gave some serious beatings on my buttocks with his cane. We had to look for a compound where we had to dry the potassium using fire. That took us one night. The next day we took off and the next stop was my uncle's compound at Wombong. The Babanki man thought that I would continue with him to Babanki. I did not tell him anything but gave a report to my uncle on how we travelled. We stayed and very early in the morning I sneaked out and only came back to the compound late in the evening. When I came back the man was still waiting for me. I made my mind clear to him that I would not continue to Babanki (somebody comes in to greet (...)) My uncle accepted and told the man to continue without me. The journey was the most difficult journey I ever made. It lasted for one month.

The next person who came and collected me from my uncle was Sixtus Jum. He is of late. He took permission from my uncle. We were to go to Adeima (Adamawa). Adeima was a place where people used to take sweet potatoes and hides and skins from Kom for sale there. We did not carry anything because we were going to buy clothes. It was a very good and enjoyable trip. We were never in haste and anybody who was in haste was given way to pass. We were gradual and it took us two weeks to go and two weeks to come back. When we arrived we bought nothing but clothes which he carried and then I also carried my own. There was a big difference between the trip to Membelewa and Adeima. On our way to Adeima there was no hurry and there were areas where we bought our food but on the way to Membelewa, we cooked our own food and there was a lot of force used in this area. They will cut the clothes far below the normal measurement and so made so much gain. One good thing which I benefited from that trip was a bathali, which was a type of towel with several bed bugs in it (he laughs). At least it was good as compared to the trip I made to Membelewa. He further gave to me a new dress and also gave me a loin which I was to use as a blanket.²²

Henry's story calls for three comments: First, it shows how carriers were recruited and deployed by long-distance traders. From his story it seems that carriers were relatively young and were hired from their parents. In Henry's case he was staying with his uncle when the trader from Babanki negotiated with his uncle to take him to Northern Nigeria. But his uncle had to ask his father's consent before hiring him out to the trader. It was only with the permission of Henry's father that he embarked on the trip to Northern Nigeria. Secondly, it shows the challenges and difficulties associated with the trade. Peter's case is a good example but Henry's experience varies only in the fact that he transported potassium and onions. His story sheds further light on the difficulties that were generally encountered *en route*. It also shows how trade and traders introduced new things into Kom. A third issue is the fact that merchants represented different hierarchies: a merchant and carrier class. Unlike the older generation of chinda-traders, they made their fortune from hard work, energy and ambition. It would also appear that the traders were not from particular or privileged lineages. But it is certain that merchants did not take their own children for short or long distance trade.

The goods were carried in two baskets hung at the two ends of a bamboo pole about two metres long and carried on the shoulders. The carrier supported himself and the load with a long walking stick. In one of the baskets there was a knife to be used as a defence weapon in case of an attack.

The Kom experience of trade was similar to that elsewhere in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. As Pfaff points out these traders not only transported goods but more importantly newness and new ideas into Kom. As makers of new wealth and bearers of

²² Interview with Henry Foinkijem, 76 years, Njinikom, 21 December 2008.



Photo 3.1 A Kom carrier with his luggage en route to Northern Nigeria in 1940

Source: Buea National Archives

new ideas they were bonded as a new class with a new identity and formed a new social stratum. Consciously or unconsciously they represented a new way of life and controlled many carriers, wives, children and big compounds.

The Kom encounter with colonialism ruptured Kom society more profoundly. The pre-colonial period with its commercial and political hierarchies in trade and other activities was shaken. For example, in the colonial situation the old hierarchies – which included the Fon, *nkwifoyn* and quarter heads – were reinforced, and the structures which were put in place like the wider roads accelerated geographical mobility patterns. It also witnessed the emergence of rooted new social classes based on commercial capitalism and labour mobility that was hitherto unknown. Iliffe (1983: 6-7) reminds us that African capitalism existed before the advent of European colonialism. Meanwhile, Crush et al. (2005: 1-40) and Ranger (1988: 255-268) have shown that in Central and Southern Africa, colonialism created new forms of migration through labour that was needed in the plantations and other enterprises and sectors created by the colonial situation. In particular, Crush and others have shown how in the 1990s the end of the Apartheid era led to the restructuring of the state creating different patterns of migration while Ranger has shown how young men migrated to Rhodesia or to Kenya because

colonialism created niches which eventually influenced the migration of people in ways that did not exist before.

That re-organisation of Kom under the colonial rule led to the creation of new hierarchies that exacerbated old social hierarchies and brought about tensions within the society. The Fon who at the pinnacle of power before the arrival of the Germans was checked only by *nkwifoyn* was now under colonial control, answerable to the colonial authorities. Traditional hierarchies had no serious preference for the youths which meant that they were not really recognized as important, a point much reiterated by Mamdani (1996: 37-62). The youths, boys and girls who were anxious for recognition, tended to see the church and other colonial spaces as the only alternative. They became bearers of new cultures who for lack of a better word were thus 'local heroes and heroines', or what Okot p'Bitek (1968: 205) pejoratively calls 'the dogs of the white-man which (...) understand English'.

That re-organisation made possible by roads led to the movement of labour from the Bamenda Grasslands which became a labour reservoir. The need for labour from the Bamenda Grasslands is partly explained by the fact that the area was one of the most heavily populated areas in the whole of the Southern Cameroons and also because the coastal peoples on whose land the plantations were established, could not provide enough labour. Kom people also moved to the coastal plantations. Konings (2001: 174) has studied the plantation economy in Cameroon and has provided some illuminating Photos from the Bamenda Grasslands from 1926 to 1990, although the Photos do not specify the number of Kom in the plantations. Ardener et al. (1960) show that there were 256 Kom people in Victoria plantations in 1928 and by 1937 they were 518 men. Statistics available in the Buea National Archives show that between 1947 and 1958 there were 3,722 Kom people in the plantations. During the German period (1884-1916) the Fon supplied the labour but during the British Mandate (1922-1945) labour in the plantations became 'voluntary'. During that period a new class of labour recruiters emerged.

Boniface Ngoh was one of such recruiters. He was born in Njinikom in 1928 and studied in St. Anthony's School, Njinikom. He continued his education in Baseng, Kumba Division and completed his elementary school in Kumba Government School in 1947 where he obtained his Standard Six Certificate. He was employed as a plantation labourer in 1967 and gradually rose to the rank of a recruiter in 1973. Between 1973 and 1998 when he retired; he recruited 7,800 Kom people to work in the plantations.²³ In so doing he arguably contributed to a new pattern of geographical mobility as many more Kom people moved to the plantations.

Generally, those who went to the plantations returned to Kom as people whose mental horizons had been widened. This was evident in the way they behaved, spoke and dressed. They were relatively young and became the carriers and models of *kfaang*²⁴. Some remained at the Coast and founded Kom communities like Bamukom in Tiko and Bai-Bikom, in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. However, they always kept in touch with Kom and remained attached to the cultural practices of Kom.

²³ Interview with Boniface Ngoh, 80 years, at Njinikom, 27 June 2008.

²⁴ More activities of 'coast men' are a subject of Chapter Eight.

The British period (*tu ingris*), c. 1920s - 1961

The British took over one-fifth of the Cameroons from the Germans.²⁵ The rest was taken over by the French. In 1922 the British created Native Authorities (NAs) in the most densely populated areas of the Cameroons Province and Kom was one of them. The Fons were empowered as the heads of NAs and were responsible for the collection of taxes. Since the mainstay of the economy was subsistence agriculture, many Kom people had to move out in search of money to pay taxes and some also did so to evade the tax system. It is quite plain that the NAs re-enforced traditional hierarchies and at the same time led to the spatial mobility of the people.

In 1927 Christianity was introduced into Kom although with some resistance by the Kom. It brought schooling and Kom had the first Standard Six Catholic School which was opened in 1928 in the Bamenda Grasslands. People from the entire Grasslands and as far as the coastal area of Cameroon trekked to Kom for schooling (Booth, 1971 and O'Neil, 1991). This school provided the opportunity for some to learn to read and write and hence the emergence of a literate group. Those who appropriated this new technology further became mobile both geographically and socially. With the constant movements of Kom people, new ideas emerged about Kom and the outside world.

In September 1939, the Second World War broke out in Europe. Many Kom people were recruited into the British army. Ignatius Chiwo, born in 1922, was one of the soldiers. He fought in The Gambia, Tripoli, Burma and India. According to him there were more than 250 Kom people in his regiment alone. He claims that there were many more but they only knew each other when they came home after demobilization. One such was Francis Chiafukuin Ngam, who confirmed the story.²⁶ The war therefore led to the geographical mobility of Kom people. The ex-soldiers who participated in the war represented a new social stratum in the society.

At the end of the war the mandated territories were replaced by Trust Territories, among them the British Cameroons. UN missions visited the territory from time to time and charted the progress towards self government. The British responded by introducing reforms. Consequently in 1949 the Cameroon Province was reorganized, and the Bamenda Division was divided into three regions: Bamenda, Wum and Nkambe. Kom

²⁵ Cameroon became a German colony on Monday, July 14, 1884 and in 1889 Eugene Zintgraff the German explorer arrived in Kom on his exploratory venture. When the Germans started the construction of the Bamenda Berzik in 1902, the Fon of Kom provided labour and food. Kom young men were also recruited into the German Schuttruppe as soldiers, messengers and porters. It was on this arrangement that the Germans relied for effective administration of the area. With free labour a narrow road was constructed for at least horse-drawn wagons from Bamenda to Kom. The accessibility of the sub-region by the narrow road made it possible for German administrators from Bamenda to visit the area. For instance, in 1905, Lt. Von Heigelin visited Laikom, Belo, Fuanantui, Anyajua and Anjin. In 1908, two German posts manned by soldiers were erected at Sho and Njinikom. In 1914 during the Great War, some Kom people followed the Germans to Fernanda Po (present day Equatorial Guinea) and returned to Kom only in the early 1920s. These mobile people returned with new ideas and new culture that were to suffocate and convulse the established order. A case in point was Michael Timneng and his followers. More on him and his followers appears in Chapter 6. It is probable and almost certain that those who worked with the Germans as labourers, porters and soldiers represented another class in the society.

²⁶ Ignatius Chiwo, 87 years, interview Njinikom, 30th September 2008. He died on 15 August 2009; Francis Chiafukuin Ngam, 89 years, interview Fundong, 30 August 2009.

belonged to the Wum Division²⁷. That re-organisation came with the creation of new structures which included the Native courts, Native Treasuries, court clerks, messengers and tax collectors. The introduction of tax collectors was new. During the German period the Fon was the only person who collected the tax and took it to Bamenda where the German headquarters were found. However, the introduction of the above structures gave birth to a new social class.

In the mid-1950s, the 'winds of change', decolonization and the idea of independence for African colonies was already blowing across Africa. The demand for independence became more insistent. Kom elites strongly participated in the demand for independence through their membership of political parties in Kom. One such party, the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) which won the 1959 elections, had a strong bastion in Kom. The presence of that party also contributed to the creation of new hierarchies in the form of political messengers and politicians. In 1961, Southern Cameroons gained its independence from Nigeria and joined the French Cameroon which already gained her independence from France in January 1960. The post colonial period also created new ways which labour mobility flew and further technologies gave birth to new social hierarchies.

The post colonial period, 1961-1998

After independence in 1961, the British Southern Cameroons united with the Republic of Cameroon, the former French Mandate, to form the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The British method of administering West Cameroon for tax collection purposes still existed. The West Cameroon House of chiefs also remained. Tax collection was facilitated by village tax collectors who were appointed by NAs on the recommendation of the Fon. In Kom they included Jacob Kimeng, Dickson Diagha, Omer Tim, Simon Ngong, John Njuakom, Simon Kang, Kukwa Bi, Nges Fultang, Ngong Bi, Johannes Chibu and Sylvester Chitu. They constituted a new and influential social stratum in Kom society. They were mostly princes and quarter heads.²⁸

The federal system was abolished and replaced by a unitary state in May 1972. The impact was that Cameroon was divided into seven provinces and forty-two divisions. Kom became a Sub-Division of Menchum Division, a new administrative unit was at Njinikom, but it was later transferred to Fundong. This administrative re-structuring meant that in Kom new administrative offices were opened. New ways of geographical mobility were created. These new ways included mobility not so much focused in the direction of the plantations. Socially, most people gained employment as clerks, messengers, drivers and court clerks.

Following the new administrative decentralisation of Cameroon in 1992, Boyo Division was created out of Menchum, by Decree No. 92/186 of 1/9/92. It was further divided into three sub-divisions: Belo with Belo as the capital; Njinikom with its capital in Njinikom and Fundong which doubled as the capital of Boyo Division and Fundong sub-Divisions. The creation of Boyo division led to the creation of new services as well as employment opportunities. More Government Secondary and Technical Schools,

²⁷ File Cb (1949)2, Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Administration of Cameroons under United Kingdom Trusteeship for the year 1949 (NAB).

²⁸ File no. 031/134, Appointment of 1966-67 Tax collectors, Kom Council (NAB).

Catholic primary schools, health services, and new roads were created. These technologies led to more geographical and social mobility of people.²⁹

In 1993, the reconstruction of Bamenda-Fundong road began. This time it was a bituminous road. The construction was completed in 1998 and this greatly facilitated movement in and out of Kom.

Conclusion

We have seen that Kom was a state born of conquest and expansion. Kom like most Fondoms in the Bamenda Grasslands was created by excluding and co-opting other people who were not Kom. The Fon was at the pinnacle of power and remained a spiritual and political custodian of his people. He was assisted politically by the *nkwifoyn* and village heads. In this chapter the position of the Fon in relation to governance and negotiation which allowed the technologies to settle in the Fondom has been examined. Various factors were responsible for the geographical mobility of Kom people and following the colonial report of 1927 Kom people trekked to various places mainly to the coast and Nigeria. Traders were important not only because they were responsible for the introduction of new things (*kfaang*) which included zinc, onions, and clothes but because they also gave birth to other social hierarchies. Together with the merchants were tax collectors and 'boy boy' who constitute new men responsible for further social change and introduction of *kfaang* into Kom. The political and socio-economic developments in Cameroon from the colonial to post-colonial period directly and indirectly affected Kom in terms of mobility and the creation of social hierarchies and technologies. The presence and the negotiation of the Fon played a significant role. The next chapter focuses on the construction of the road of newness (*ndzi kfaang*) which further accelerated the geographical mobility of Kom people.

²⁹ See Monographic Study, Njinikom Council: Organised and Funded by Njinikom Council and Canadian Cooperation Support Office, Governance and Civil Society Fund (Fonds GSC), Canadian Embassy Yaoundé 2006, pp. 11-12.

Roads, mobility and *kfaang*, c. 1928 - 1998

Introduction

Throughout history roads, even if only in the form of footpaths, have been an important factor in peoples' geographical mobility from place to place. They have been one of the means of connecting people and places. In pre-colonial and colonial Africa footpaths performed much of this function. According to Rodney (1981) and Ferguson (1990) during the colonial period especially, motor roads were constructed to exploit human and natural resources. This Chapter goes beyond Rodney and Ferguson and argues that roads also fundamentally increased and eased geographical mobility in Kom and elsewhere in Africa. It examines roads as a technology which Kom called *ndzi kfaang* and their impact on Kom. In other words roads were the novel way, the new path in a literal and a symbolic sense.

During the pre-colonial and early colonial period Kom mobility comprised mainly trekking on footpaths from Kom through Babanki, Bambui Bamenda and beyond to Nkongsamba, Coast and parts of Nigeria. The major footpaths from Kom to Bamenda were *Tuang falla*, *Gwin Ngwabeilla*, *Ibalingoh*, *Mughom*, and *Ngwin Mbzingou*. This chapter shows how living in a marginal area the people of Kom perceived it in relation to the road. The Chapter examines the perception and conceptions which Kom people had of the road as *kfaang* but also how the colonial and post-colonial authorities justified the existence of the road as development and progress. Secondly, it shows how, Kom traditional political structure was reinforced as the Fon and *nkwifoyn* were charged with recruiting labour for the road construction. Road construction was therefore a result of negotiation between the colonial administration and the Fon. What did a widened road mean to colonial and post colonial authorities? What did it mean to Kom people?

Colonialism and road construction

The importance of roads was never in doubt at the beginning of colonial venture. Speaking of German rule, Rudin (1938: 237) makes the point unequivocally. 'Roads were an administrative, commercial, and military necessity from the beginning of the occupation of the colonial territory'. The interest of British colonial authorities in widening the roads was to overcome the disadvantages of the carrier system and reduce the cost of running the colony to its barest minimum, with the colony bearing the cost. Before colonialism the only system of transport available was portage (Lugard, 1926:

236). Lugard (1926: 472-473), estimated the cost of a porter, including subsistence on the return journey and a margin for sickness and supervision, at three shillings per ton mile. 'It follows that produce worth £30 a ton at the port of shipment will have cost its full value to transport over a distance of less than 200 miles, leaving nothing for original cost of production and profit to the producer'. Like Lugard, Sir Gerald Portal in East Africa, writing about carriers, commented on the disadvantage of human beings in the following words: 'as an animal of burden man is out and out the worst. He eats more, carries less, is more liable to sickness, gets over less ground, is more expensive, more troublesome and in every way less satisfactory than the meanest four-footed creature that can be trained, induced or forced to carry load' (Neumark, N.D., 39). Lugard further laid down some principles following which the roads should be constructed. According to him,

A common error is to make the road too broad, and so to deprive it of shade. A 24-ft track of metal if required is ample (...) it is a matter of the first importance to interest the native administrations in road construction, and to train native road makers who should be capable of directing the work under occasional supervision, leaving the bridging to be done by the public works department (Lugard, 1926: 475).

Thus for a number of reasons roads became a top priority for the colonial enterprise in Africa.

British colonial administrators in Cameroon spent enormous efforts justifying not only the inevitability but the desirability of 'good' roads, first, in the Cameroon Province and second in the Bamenda Province. From the perspective of the Cameroon Province, writing about the main trunk road linking Bamenda and Cameroons Province, Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lennox-Boyd, stated:

I have the honour to inform you that my council of Ministers has recently had under review the adequacy of present plans for the improvement of the Federal Trunk Road A4 which runs from Victoria to Bamenda. This road which is the spinal cord of all land communications in the Southern part of the Cameroons Trust Territory must be given priority (...) the opening of a all-season artery from Bamenda to the Eastern Region boundary and to the coastal ports of Victoria and Tiko is undoubtedly the prime necessity among all others at the present time (...) The road will be equally valuable in facilitating the movements of country's produce from the food-surplus space of the Bamenda Highlands towards the densely populated Eastern Region.¹

In other words, Lennox-Boyd was justifying road construction on economic grounds: roads were needed to evacuate raw materials from the hinterland to the coast and the Eastern region of Nigeria.

In 1960, Kenneth E. Berill, the British economic adviser to Southern Cameroons government in a letter to J.O Field, Commissioner of the Cameroons, said: 'the most important form of communication in the territory is the road. Every commentator in the territory stressed the importance of roads as the key to the future'.² The two quotations do not leave any doubt. The road was justified on the grounds of exporting food from Bamenda to the Eastern Region of Nigeria. It symbolized newness and development. As in the case of the Lunda-Ndembu people studied by Prichett, (2000: 28), 'food emerged increasingly as the key to maintaining the caravan system (...)'.³

¹ File Rc 1956/2 Cameroons Road Programme Policy (NAB); Also see CO 583/248/11 Cameroon Report on Road Communication (PRO).

² File Qc (1960) Kenneth E. Berill to J.O. Fields, The Economy of the Southern Cameroons: A Report Submitted to J.O. Fields Commissioner of Southern Cameroons 25/August 1960 (NAB).

Bamenda Province had raw materials and was densely populated. In 1925, the D.O., G.H. Findlay, was explicit when he wrote about the need for roads. Amongst other things he said:

The Grassfields of Bamenda plateau support large herds of Fulani cattle and sheep, goats and chickens are plentiful and cheap. In the coast regions, there is a very large demand for foodstuffs of all kinds which at present has to be met largely by imported rice and Norwegian stock fish. Cattle, goats and sheep are brought down in caravans by Hausa traders all through the short dry season in spite of the difficulties of the unbridged rivers, deep ravines and dense forest (...) This province has approximately 400,000 people, 75% of whom belong to virile hardworking tribes. In spite of their primitive conditions of social life and ignorance of the world thousands of their young men voluntarily travel from 100 to 200 miles from the interior highlands to work on the plantations or to bring produce to the factories on the rivers and the coast. This proves that these tribes are eager to take advantage of a social and commercial development which can only be brought to their homes by road.³

Apart from foodstuffs and cattle which were found in the region, the D.O. saw the need for a wider road differently. According to him, the Bamenda Province had a population of about 400,000 people and most of those people were mobile despite the obstacles in their way such as wild forest and fast flowing rivers. If the area were linked by a wider road, it was an opportunity for those strong people to increase in numbers and go down to work in coastal plantations.

With hindsight, it can be seen that the Report was written in a typical post-enlightenment creed which was largely pegged on insidious racist ideologies. The language supports that view. It is difficult if not impossible to understand that indigenous people were addressed as 'primitive tribes' who were ignorant of the world. Before colonialism Africa and Africans were people living within their own type of civilization. For the colonial officer to address them thus was unfortunate.⁴ The views of D.O. were however, typical of the views of early twentieth century Europeans writing on Africa.

Writing in 1941, Lord Moyne, Secretary of State for the Colonies said:

(...) A report by O.J. Voelker of the Agricultural Department who made a special survey of the whole Bamenda area revealed that the Bamenda area is one of the richest agricultural areas in West Africa and its climate is suitable for the cultivation of certain sub tropical crops. The high quality of grazing is shown by the presence of large herds of excellent cattle totalling over 150,000 heads. The population of Bamenda Division is estimated at above 300,000, physical fitness is of a very high standard probably among, if not the highest in West Africa (...) but the area lacks a good road network to link it with the coastal and Eastern Regions.⁵

Moyne was right: It was because of the rich agricultural potential of the region due to its healthy sub-tropical climate, its dense and physically fit population and its large herd of cattle it was necessary for a wider road to connect Bamenda and the coastal area. All over the British West Africa, the construction of roads was justified in terms of exporting the raw materials from the particular areas in which they were found (Rodney, 1981: 165-172; Hallett, 1999: 60-61; Ayandele et al., 1971: 157-162; Webster & Boa-

³ File No. 1530/1925 Rc/a (1925)1 Future Development of Nigeria: Propaganda for Road Development, Cameroons Province (NAB).

⁴ File NW/Fa. 1950/1, Tours and visit of Senior Officers to the Bamenda Province. Re-Touring Notes (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

⁵ CO 583/262/6, Local Production and Local Industry Development for CD and W monies for the completion of the Bamenda-Mamfe-Kumba-Victoria road system in the Cameroons (PRO).

hen, 1980: 223-236). Although it was justified thus, the report of SDO on road communication in Bamenda Division implied that roads might mean progress.

The Division is very backward in road communication: it is its most pressing problem. Many people remain locked behind mountains, their economic urges stymied at the outset for lack of an outlet to markets. They are deprived of the civilising influences and advantages which roads bring in their wake, so many of them, the most valuable of them all, the youth, leave home for the excitement of the south, a permanent loss to the economic productivity of this area (...).⁶

With that agenda, the British colonial administration saw the connection of the Bamenda area as absolutely important. Further ‘artery’ roads that were to link Bamenda to the interior were also seen as necessary if the colonial enterprise was to succeed in terms of ‘development’ and ‘progress’.

The views of the various colonial officers, first and foremost are revealing of the colonial situation. In Africa under British control, the colonial venture was justified by one idea and ideology – Indirect Rule. It became relevant and important because Lugard wanted each colony to pay for itself. This meant that the cost of any project carried out in the colony was to be borne by the Africans and not the British tax payer. The colony should be self-sufficient as far as the costs of the colonial administration were concerned. Webster & Boahen (1980: 224) and Reid (2009: 146), have rightly maintained that because roads were to be largely constructed with local funds, development was slowed down not because there were no finances but instead because the British ‘deliberately held back development funds (...)’. Roads therefore were to be constructed with cheap labour. One of those roads that were to connect Bamenda into the interior was the Bamenda-Njinikom-Kom road.

Bamenda-Njinikom road, c. 1928 - c. 1954

The road construction policy of the British colonial administration was similar to that of their German predecessors.⁷ The difference was that in Kom as elsewhere Native Authorities (NAs), were in charge of road construction with labour supplied by the Fon. The Kom road was surveyed in 1924 by British civil engineers, but heavy rains delayed the beginning of work until 1928.⁸ In this connection it was stated, ‘the new trace for the Bamenda-Njinikom road has been inspected and an alternative alignment suggested, it will be impossible deciding which alignment is more preferable until after the rains’.⁹ In practice, each Fon was assigned to a portion of the road. The first stretch of the road was from Mbzinguo to Belo.

⁶ File NW/Fa. 1950/1, Tours and visit of Senior Officers to the Bamenda Province. Re-Touring Notes (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

⁷ The Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884 and by 1889 they had penetrated the interior and reached the Bamenda Grasslands. In their economic development, they constructed earth roads which were just enough for either horse-drawn carts or motor cycles. The roads therefore were mostly narrow and could not carry any reasonable traffic. The British continued in the same tracks but widened and constructed bridges.

⁸ File Ba (1924)2 Report for the League of Nations (NAB); File Ba (1923) Report for the League of Nations (NAB).

⁹ File Cb 1924/2 Quarterly Reports on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province, March 1924-September 1927(NAB); File Cb (1928/2) Bamenda Division Annual Report for the Year ending December 1928(NAB); Annual Reports for Bamenda Division for the years, 1932, 1933, 1934-35, 1937 and 1939 (NAB).

The Fon and the road construction

The road was constructed in phases and the labour was generally controlled by the Fon and his traditional council. One informant who actively participated in the construction stated that there were always more than one hundred and fifty people working on the project at a time. He claimed that at one time the people of Njinikom threatened to stop the construction and their priest, Rev. Fr. Ivo Stockman of the Catholic mission pressured them not to do so.¹⁰ The road signified progress and the missionaries were also agents of progress. They worked hand in glove with the colonial regime. The Reverend Father took the road seriously and therefore worked hard to convince his parishioners to participate in its construction.

The labourers were supervised by foremen, who were selected and recruited by the NA.¹¹ On the eve of commencement of the work the Fon sent out the town crier to announce it to the village.¹² All adults were obliged to participate. One of the people who observed the construction of the road was Henry Mbain. He was born in 1940 at Anjin, Kom. He attended the Catholic Primary School, Anjin and later on transferred to Catholic School, Baingoh, Kom where he obtained his Standard Six Certificate in 1958. In 1961 he migrated to Tiko in search of greener pastures where he worked at the Tiko banana plantations. In 1963 he returned to Kom where he was baptized. In 1964 he travelled back, but to Buea where he succeeded to work at the Prime Minister's Office. In 1969, he was transferred to the National Archives Buea where he worked till 2008. According to him the village police, the *nikangsii*, were ordered to ensure that there were no absentees and any such absentees were fined from £1 to £2:15s¹³ by the Fon and the traditional council.

The role of the Fon and his council illustrates that the success of the colonial enterprise depended on the aid of Africans. Cooper (1994: 1516-1517), while supporting this view, observed that, 'recognition of the much greater power of Europeans in the colonial encounter does not negate the importance of African agency in determining the shape the encounter took (...) the routinization of power demanded alliances with local authority Photos, be they lineage heads or kings'. Chilver (1963: 100-108) states that the Fon's collaboration was due to the promises which the British made to reward those who collaborated with them with salaries paid to them from Native Authorities treasuries. While supporting Chilver, Cooper (1996: 156) maintains that 'the bulk of road mileage in British Africa was constructed by local authorities which were a euphemism for chiefs or Native Authorities who legitimated forced labour'. The road in itself was a material token of 'modernization' a point which Fermin-Sellers (2001: 43-62) confirms with a study of the Fon of Akum, Cameroon. The period between the wars was the heyday of 'industrialization' and 'modernisation' in the African colonies and road

¹⁰ Interview with Otto Ngesbinain, 77 years, Belo, 12 July 2008. He worked on the road as one of the labourers. This information was also cross-checked with some archival data. See File Cb (1928) 2 Annual Report for Bamenda Division, 1930 by L.L. Cattle; R.M.W. Duncan and N.C. Denton; File Sd (1930)2 Fr. Stockman to the Resident 1930 (NAB).

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² A town crier was an official of the council and used a gong – a hollow metal instrument to make official announcements in the village usually at dinner time.

¹³ Interview with Henry Mbain, Buea, 13 December 2007. He died on 15 February 2008.

construction was in line with such policies. Modernisation and/or industrialization symbolized social change and the Bamenda-Njinikom road fell within such an ideology.

The traditional political elite, the Fon and his traditional council, was however re-enforced in the interest of the colonial regime. In the eyes of the indigenous population the powers were reduced because the Fon was now taking instructions from the colonial official which was not the case before colonialism. Such processes could be argued to be part of what some scholars have seen as the transition from tradition to modernity (see Odetola & Ademola, 1985: 211). Yet it is important to note that the role of the Fon showed that for technology to take root in Kom it needed to be accepted through negotiation with the colonial administration. Overall, a wider road led to an increase in the geographical mobility of Kom people and development of the region. This was widely confirmed by the support of the people.

The enthusiasm of Bamenda Grasslanders in general and Kom in particular is reflected in the words of the Resident of the Province that:

There has been an immense enthusiasm for road construction since the first motor vehicle arrived in Bamenda two years ago. In the forest regions of Mamfe, Kumba and Victoria, this enthusiasm is inspired by the people's intense dislike for everything on head load and their determination not to carry them a day longer than necessary. Among the Bamenda grassland tribes, there is no particular objection to head loads but this is fully balanced by the eagerness of an intelligent virile people to have their share of the good things in a world which is just beginning to open for them (...).¹⁴

To say that the Bamenda people were virile and enthusiastic seems cannot be denied but the claim that that people were just beginning to have a share of the good things in a world which was starting to open for them is debatable. Bamenda area had been opened to the outside world since the 19th Century. Most of the slaves exported from the Bight of Biafra came from the Bamenda Grasslands (Austen & Derrick, 1999; Rowlands, 1979 and Warnier, 1985). This is corroborated by the oral testimonies of merchants and traders who traded with Eastern Nigeria, Yola and Makurdi. The statement of colonial officials was however merely defending the colonial ideology which claimed that colonialism was spreading civilisation among primitive Africans and Asians.

At the same time however, and more importantly, 'the enthusiasm' displayed by the people was an indication that they had accepted and interpreted *kfaang* and were willing to adapt it because they, as Ferguson maintains about the Zambians in the Copperbelt, expected modern things to be brought by roads (Ferguson, 1999: 13). The road itself represented the coexistence of 'newness' with 'oldness' that they called *ndzi kfaang*. The enthusiasm of the people was noted by the commissioner of Southern Cameroons in 1958 when he said that 'The Njinikom road was built by community effort and is a praiseworthy effort because all men and women came out at any one time for its construction (...)'.¹⁵

The people realised the implications of widening footpaths for wider and new roads. In their perception, *dzi kfaang*, the road of newness, was better. The wider road could take more people not moving in a caravan straight line. Some informants claimed that *kfaang* was better and so the road was in effect far better than the footpaths which they once travelled to Bamenda and beyond.¹⁶ *Kfaang* meant many things to Kom people. It

¹⁴ File Rc/a (1929)1 Native administrative roads: Tour of the resident in Cameroons (NAB).

¹⁵ File NW/Fa. 1958/1, Commissioner of the Cameroons Inspection notes – Bamenda, Nkambe and Wum Division 29 April-12 May 1958 (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

¹⁶ Interview with Marx Njuakom, 75 years, Abuh Kom, 20 August 2007.

denoted newness, innovation and novelty in thinking and doing, and the material benefits which were their result. The construction of the road showed that *Kfaang* was internalized although almost invariably externally derived. The most important characteristic meaning of *kfaang*, therefore was that which was 'new', and foreign-derived, or simply something internally generated that is not the characteristic Kom way of seeing and doing. The mass enthusiasm of the people for road construction indicated *kfaang* in the thinking and in doing. Consequently, to most people *kfaang* was that which was new, good and durable.

The fact that the people recognised *kfaang* and admired the road as such were two sides of the same coin. For the colonial regime, the construction of the Bamenda-Njinikom-Kom road had a different motivation. It was designed to link with the Bamenda ring¹⁷ road at Bambui and eventually to Kom in order to draw labour and abundant raw materials from there. The Fondom had a total population of 13,454 in 1927 out of a population of 287,748 for the whole of Bamenda Province.¹⁸ In addition, there were raw materials like cattle, timber, rice, Irish potatoes, corn and beans¹⁹. This meant that the road was justified on economic grounds and mobility was just one of them. Writing about roads, McPhee (1971: 128) has confirmed that had the roads not served an economic purpose in the colonial situation they would have been abandoned.

Men provided most of the labour. But their work was supplemented with that of women, in contrast to Wrigley's (1986: 79) assertion that 'mostly African males had to turn out to make the road (...)'. The contribution of women has not been adequately acknowledged in the research on road construction in colonial Africa. In Kom experience women were assigned to feed workers and five women usually fed at least 15 to 35 men. Nayah Bih was one of the women who fed the men in road construction. According to her women 'willingly' and 'enthusiastically' did their work as they felt that they were welcoming *kfaang*. She also claimed that their enthusiasm and willingness was especially great on days that the construction did not conflict with farm work. Children fetched potable water.²⁰

The willingness of women was not ignored in colonial reports. The chief Commissioner of Southern Cameroons, Sir Bernard Carr, noted that women and children worked happily but also that their labour alone could not be sufficient because women could not constitute an adequate labour force, 'without detriment to their subsistence farming and domestic duties'.²¹ In other words, although women were willing to work on the road construction, their other duties, especially farming, and other domestic chores, were all a limiting factor. Women performed most if not all the subsistence agriculture in Kom and the colonial report was right to note that it was a significant limitation on their role in road construction.

¹⁷ The ring road was designed to link Bamenda-Nso-Nkambe-Wum-Bamenda. See Bamenda Annual Reports for 1948, 50, and 1951(NAB).

¹⁸ File E-10-54A-*Ethnologisches n. Geschichtliches inbor die Grassland-Stamme* (Mission 21 Archives, Basel, Switzerland); for the population of the Bamenda Province see Annual Report: Bamenda Province 1st November 1951 to 31st December 1952 by Acting Resident, J. Brayne-Baker (NAB).

¹⁹ File C1 1966/1 Economics and Political Reports, Menchum Division, 1966-1972 (NAB).

²⁰ Interview with Nayah Bih, 75 years, Njinikom, 28 July 2007. She was one of the women who contributed to the road construction by feeding workers.

²¹ File NW/FA/1937/1, Inspection Notes by His Honour the chief Commissioner, Sir Benard Carr (Bamenda Provincial Archives, Bamenda).



Photo 4.1 People constructing the road

Source: Cameroon under United Kingdom Administration, 1948 Report/ Road construction in Kom, Wum Division (NAB).

By 1949 the Bamenda-Njinikom-Kom road had reached Belo, but the bridges were of wood. Consequently, only light vehicles and motor-cycles could reach Belo. The big River *Mughom* was finally bridged in 1952. The road was opened in March 1954 and traffic could reach Njinikom.²² In 1959 it reached Fundong.²³

Njinikom-Fundong road, 1955-1959

The last section of the road connected Njinikom with Fundong and was completed under the auspices of Community Development, an institution with indigenous membership for executing projects which the colonial administration considered 'useful' to

²² File Rc (1955) The Native Administration Roads in Bamenda Division (NAB); also see File Cb (1954) Bamenda Division Report (NAB).

²³ File Cb1949/1 Bamenda Annual Province Reports, 1949, 1950 and 1951.

people.²⁴ This section was the most taxing because of the difficult topography. The population was most enthusiastic about completing it. The D.O. was also happy with the construction of the road and the commitment of the population to it. Writing in 1956, the Resident of Bamenda Division, A.B. Westmacott, stated:

Everywhere in the Bamenda Province there are miles of roads constructed by the people. But it is the realms of Community Development that the most spectacular progress has been made in the province. In fact, the strides made here are so tremendous that they far outstrip the capabilities of the Government funds. Everywhere in the province, there are miles of road which have been dug by the enthusiastic people but which are not motorable for their entire lengths because there are no funds to construct the bridges and culverts (...) The road at Njinikom under construction to link Fundong descends about 1000 feet to a river in about 2 miles of twisting road, and then ascending over 1,500 feet up the other side of the valley on its way towards Fundong. It is important and certain that their leaders should be congratulated on the energetic and determined manner in which they have attacked their self-imposed task. It must be remembered, too, that Community Development forms a very cheap way of completing capital works and should be encouraged by the provision of funds, if only for that reason.²⁵

The report gives the impression that the entire Bamenda Grasslands population was engaged in road construction but even casual observation indicates that motorable roads were not found everywhere, as the D.O. reported. Much later roads reached remote areas of Kom but the hilly topography still prevented it from enjoying the provision of more motorable roads, and bridle paths were in use.

Road construction required much skilled and semi-skilled labour. The Njinikom-Fundong road employed eleven bricklayers, twelve headmen, three motor boys and two hundred and fifteen labourers.²⁶ The numbers are only indicative because the number of women and 'water boys' is not mentioned in the records, although they are in oral interviews. For instance, one of the foremen on this road was Simon Akainda. Born in 1930, he attended St. Anthony's Primary School Njinikom from 1943 to 1951 and obtained a Standard Six Certificate. He was awarded a scholarship to study building engineering in Kaduna Polytechnic, Nigeria, from 1952 to 1954. When he returned home he was first employed as a road surveyor and later as a Headman, and claims that throughout the construction of that road there was no time when there were less than fifty water boys whose duties was only to fetch water for the workers. There were also as many as forty women who fed the labourers.²⁷

The participation in road construction by Kom people was not simply because the people wanted to construct a new highway. They understood that the new road would facilitate their mobility. On the other hand, bridges and roads if they were considered as technologies appeared relevant because they contributed, however, directly or indirectly to development and mobility. Ultimately, they connected places.

²⁴ File Rc (1954), Roads in the Bamenda Division: Secretary, Eastern Provinces of Nigeria, P.T. Barton to the Resident Bamenda Province, 14th May 1953 (NAB).

²⁵ File Rc (1956) Annual Reports for Bamenda Division, 1956,1957 and 1958 (NAB); File AB, Report by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under United Kingdom Trusteeship for the year 1952 (NAB).

²⁶ File W.D. 159 C1 (1954)3 Wum Divisional Native Authority (NAB).

²⁷ Interview with Simon Akainda, 77 years Fundong, Kom, 21 August 2007. Also, for the participation of women and children on the road see File NW/FA/1937/1, Inspection Notes by His Honour the Chief Commissioner, Sir Bernard Carr.

The road linking Njinikom with Fundong was completed in 1959. In 1960 the D.O. noted with satisfaction that Kom and Bamenda were finally linked by a motorable road but that Kom was yet to be linked to other areas with economic potential and to the main road linking with Bamenda.²⁸ The Bamenda-Njinikom-Kom road ran through three major villages: Belo, Njinikom and Fundong. These villages were nodal points which connected places and people. The main road and its different arteries covered an estimated 350 kilometres. Kom was soon to be criss-crossed by a network of roads linking areas where food and raw materials were found. These road networks were in turn linked to the core areas, which included Anyajua-Babungo-Belo, Mbueni-Kikfuini-Njinikom, Fundong, Fujua-Abuh-Ngwaah-Laikom.

Ngwaah-Abuh-Fujua-Fundong road, 1959-1960

The Ngwaah-Abuh-Fundong road linked Fundong and was constructed by labour from Abuh, Ngwaah and Meli. As in other areas of road construction in Kom the work was performed mostly in the dry season. The Fon, *nkwifoyn*, and traditional council mobilised the population for the project. The importance was that ultimately it linked Laikom which was the traditional seat of the Fondom.

The importance of that road to the economy of British Cameroons cannot be over-emphasised. According to government demographic surveys Kom, had a population of between 92,379 and 160,000, half of it in the area connected by the road. Of that population, males of working age were about 40,000.²⁹

The Fundong area was also a great producer of Arabica coffee which had been introduced into Kom in the early 1930s from Nkongsamba by a trader. Between 1959 and 1969 the Fundong area cultivated 1,814,614 kilograms of coffee. Out of that quantity Ngwaah and Abuh produced over 907,321 kilograms.³⁰ Kengo (2010: 146-157), has argued that most of the roads in Bamenda Province were welcomed by the colonial authorities on the ground of providing roads to coffee farms so roads too in the Fundong area were justified.

On the other hand, the climate of Fujua favoured cattle-raising by the Fulanis. At an altitude of 1600 meters above sea level it was free of tsetse flies which caused trypanosomiasis. Cattle rearing was introduced in the first half of the 20th century by the Fulanis who supplied milk to the administrators.³¹ By 1936, there were an estimated 100,000 head of cattle in Bamenda Division.³² Out of these, 40,000 came from Kom before 1966, and 20,000 from the Fujua area.³³

²⁸ File NW/Ac (1960)/1/Bk Historical Notes Bamenda Grassfields, Bamenda Provincial Archives, Bamenda; File Gc/b (1960)1 Handing over notes, Bamenda Division (NAB); Gc/h (1961)1 Handing over notes, D.O. Wum Division (NAB).

²⁹ Demographic Survey for Menchum Division, 1966-1970. Delegation of Housing and Town Planning, Fundong.

³⁰ Kom Area Cooperative Union Limited 26th Anniversary Booklet 1959-1985, 1.

³¹ File Cb 1917/7, Report No. 3-1917, Bamenda Division (Cameroons) Annual Report for the year ended 31 December 1917 (NAB).

³² File Cb/1936/1 Bamenda Divisional and League of Nations Report (NAB).

³³ Ja/g (1960)5 Kom Council, 1960; Lf/b (1965)1 Kom Bum area council monthly returns (NAB); File Ci 1966/1 Economic and political Reports, Menchum Division, 1966-1972 (NAB).

Anyajua-Babungo-Belo road, 1955-1961

The Anyajua-Babungo-Belo road was started in late 1950s to link Anyajua and Babungo with Belo and ultimately with Bamenda. Its construction lasted more than five years because of the hilly terrain and torrential rains, which limited road work to the dry season from mid-October to mid-March (Neba, 1987: 26).

The population of Anyajua had risen from 1,750 in 1928 rose to over 3000 in 1956. The logic of that road on the colonial agenda was that Anyajua cultivated potatoes and beans. The potatoes had been recently introduced by the Irish missionaries and did well because of the favourable temperature and climate of Anyajua, which is about 1,650 meters above sea level (Winch, 2006). These potatoes were portered to Belo since there was no good road to Belo. From Belo the potatoes and beans were transported to Bamenda. The importance of the potatoes was early echoed by the League of Nations Report for Bamenda Division which reported that 'quantities of Irish potatoes are being grown and the natives export them to French Cameroon. In the long run the administration hopes to employ an Agricultural Officer to develop more fully this product with the prospect of supplying European needs in Nigeria and Gold Coast'.³⁴ Beans were also grown in great quantities. For instance, between 1958-1968, Anyajua produced more than 20,000 tons of beans, an average of 1,000 tons per annum. The foodstuffs therefore fed the Europeans and the working population as far as Tiko in Coastal Cameroon and Eastern Nigeria.³⁵

The road from Babungo to Belo covered 45 kilometres and followed an old pre-colonial track. During the pre-colonial period, kernels, groundnuts and tilapia fish came from Babungo brought in by traders from Kom and Babungo. The construction of that road to link Belo was justified by those foodstuffs. Once these foodstuffs arrived in Belo, they were transported to Bamenda. Consequently, the construction of the road increased the movement of traders and trade goods and thus improved the economic and living standards of the people.

Mbueni-Njinikom road, 1959-1979

The Mbueni-Njinikom road artery took more than three decades to complete. Three reasons accounted for this slow progress: Mbueni had a relatively small population which alone could not complete the road on schedule. Secondly, it was the NA which started the construction of the road and when local councils took over NA in 1964, the construction passed to the Kom-Bum Area Council. The bureaucratic delays of handing over notes from one jurisdiction to another took considerable time.³⁶ Third, the topography posed obstacles. The climate of Mbueni and its low-lying swampy nature permitted the cultivation of rice in such large quantities. The major products which came from Mbueni were rice, timber and fish. The colonial records do not show the quantities that were exported from that region but oral sources indicate that much rice and fish

³⁴ File Cb/1939/1 League of Nations Report 1939, Bamenda Division (NAB).

³⁵ This information was obtained from Simon Chiakoukou, 68 years, who worked with the Agricultural post in Kom during that period. He merely gave estimates which I am not taking as too exact but which as probabilities could be pointers to realities. Interview, Belo, 23 July 2008.

³⁶ File Ci (1966)1, Economic and Political Reports, Menchum Division, 1966-1972 (NAB).

were marketed at Njinikom and served the growing population while the rest went to Bamenda.³⁷ Planks from local timber were used in the roofing of the administrative buildings in both Bamenda and the district headquarters as in Njinikom. As a matter of fact the administrative buildings in Njinikom were roofed with timber that came from Mbueni³⁸. All these activities helped in changing the area.

The second phase of Bamenda-Kom road, 1993-1998

The Bamenda-Kom road began in Bamenda, the headquarters of the North West Region of Cameroon, and now extends for 72.2 kilometres to the western part of the region, and ends in Fundong, the administrative headquarters of Kom. Completed in 1959, the road deteriorated rapidly by the 1990s and was in serious need of repair. Many informants did not believe that the Cameroon government was responsible for the construction of the road. Rather they strongly contended that the German government built it. This was due to the fact that people had lost confidence in the Cameroon government. But further research about the widening and re-construction of the Bamenda-Kom road in the 1990s revealed that the Government had secured a loan of DM 52,000,000 from Germany. The agreement which was signed by Sadou Hayatou for the Government of the Republic of Cameroon and Friederich Reiche for the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany came into force in April 1987.³⁹

After the agreement, a German company, *Groupement d'Énterprise Trap-Strabag Belfinger + Berger* (TRAPP), was given the contract to construct the road. The company first conducted a feasibility study of the Bamenda and Kom road before the actual construction began and concluded that:

(...) The Bamenda-Kom road gives the project region access to the central town of the region and to Cameroon's entire road network. The region and the agricultural sector in the catchment area of the road give the impression of activity. According to information provided by the local authorities there is no above-average migration away from the region. Agriculture seems to be very diversified and intensive and the surface where farming is possible due to the topography seems largely utilized. In socio-economic terms the Bambui-Fundong road has a positive impact on the target group since people now have a safer, considerably faster and cheaper access to the central town of Bamenda and its services. Moreover, the prices of goods imported into the region have declined markedly. Due to the Bamenda-Bambui road large parts of the North-West Province may now benefit from the positive effects generated by the better access to the administrative, social and health facilities of the administrative centre of Bamenda. The poor in the region are also likely to profit from the effects of the project. From today's point of view the project also has a positive impact on women, though the impact is not extraordinary. Any major environmental damage caused by the two roads cannot be identified. The environmental damage caused is usual for normal roads and considered as acceptable. With the reform of the transport system the road maintenance system and its financing was put on a fundamentally new and more efficient basis. The experience gained up to now with the new system is

³⁷ File Ci (195 (1957)3 Annual Reports for Wum Division for 1955, 1956 and 1957 (NAB).4)3 Wum Division Native Authorities: United Nations Organisations Report (NAB); File Gi,3, Annual Reports for Wum Division, 1955, 1956 and 1957 (NAB).

³⁸ Interview with Isaiah Ngong, retired carpenter, 70 years, Njinikom, 27 January 2009.

³⁹ See confidential File NW/Ba/a. 2000/1, Road Infrastructure, Demography and Administrative issues of the Northwest Province (Bamenda Provincial Archives); Also Top Confidential File no. 27269 Federal Republic of Germany and Cameroon: Agreement concerning financial cooperation. Signed at Yaoundé on 3 April 1987, vol. 1565-27269, United Nations-Treaty Series (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

satisfactory. The opening up of the catchment area, which was the intention of the Bambui-Fundong road, has been achieved.⁴⁰

The significance of the road, however, as shown by the quotation indicates that the road would open the region and accelerate the geographical mobility of the people. The Report also explicitly demonstrated how Kom and its surroundings would benefit from the road project. Above all the feasibility studies showed that the region was to benefit from economic and social amenities. The construction of the road began in 1993 with mostly youth labour. Julius Aghaa Njua was one of the workers on the road as an engineer. He was born in 1966, at Njinikom and attended St. Anthony's Primary School from 1973 to 1980. He obtained his First School Leaving Certificate in 1980 and attended St. Bede's College, Ashing, Kom, from 1981 to 1983. Julius also attended St. Augustine's college, Nso, from 1984-1985. From 1985 to 1986 he studied electrical engineering at Kom Baptist Technical College. He said that initially the construction of the road involved 280 Cameroonians who were employed as drivers, mechanics and other technical jobs, all supervised by fifteen German and thirteen Italian engineers. The labour force of more than 700 included 276 from Kom.⁴¹ The road was completed in 1998 and it had both social and economic consequences for Kom.

The road and consequences

Connecting Kom and Bamenda with feeder roads had far-reaching social and economic consequences for Kom and its people. One year after the road reached Njinikom, the United African Company (UAC) established a branch at Njinikom. The UAC was a firm which operated in British West Africa and at its inception controlled 60 percent of British West African trade (Pedler, 1974). It began business in Bamenda in the early 1940s with agencies all over the division.⁴² Besides buying coffee and palm kernels, the company retailed a wide variety of imported goods: bicycles, sugar, tea, clothes, shoes, kerosene, lamps and cutlasses to name only a few (Pedler, 1974). Bicycles were the most prestigious items and a status symbol. One person who bought a bicycle from the UAC, Njinikom, was Michael Mbeng.

Michael was born in 1929 at Abuh, village in Kom. At fourteen he accompanied his father on his business trips. In 1943 he went to Makurdi in Nigeria to sell potatoes. That was his first long distance trip out of Kom. In 1953 he became an apprentice bricklayer and graduated in 1956. He worked out of Kom and beyond building church compounds in areas like Oku, Mbesnaku, Fundong and Bafmen, and saved enough money to buy a bicycle. He recounts how he came to buy it:

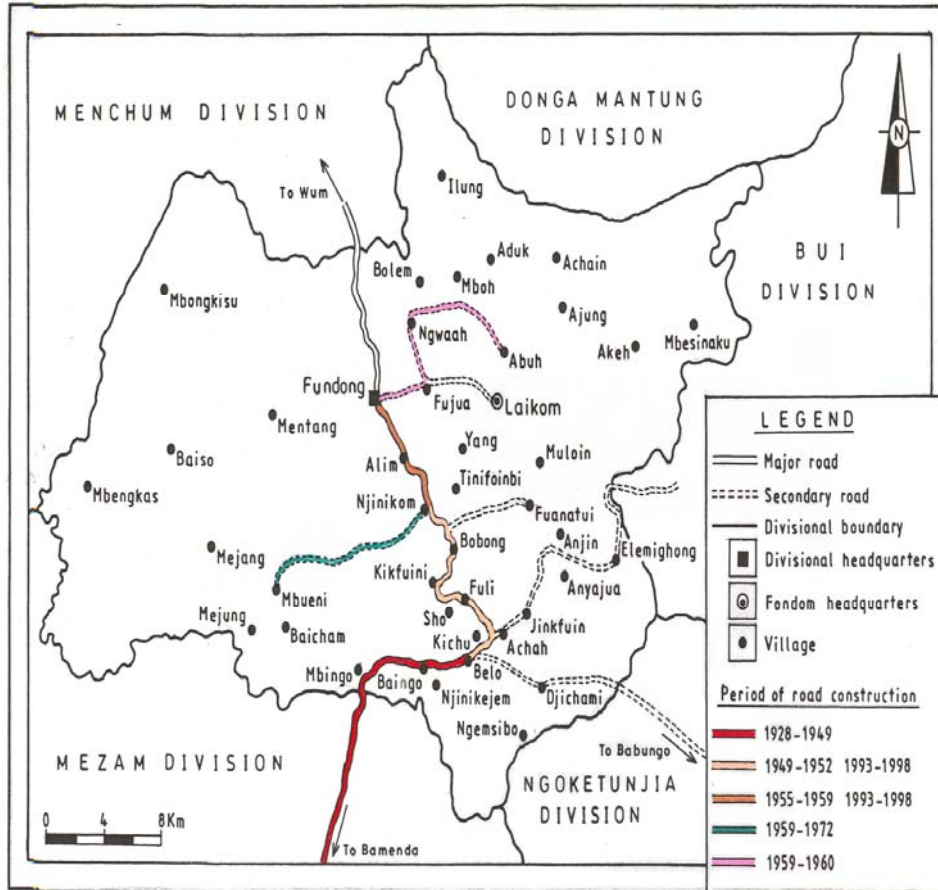
I bought a bicycle (*fyincha fi kfaang*) from the United African Company whose branch was at Njinikom at the price of 16 pounds. I bought the bicycle when I was already in Fundong and the main reason was to facilitate my movements to and from Fundong. At that time I was like a Whiteman. I

⁴⁰ See confidential File NW/Ba/a. 2000/1, Road Infrastructure, Demography and Administrative issues of the Northwest Province (Bamenda Provincial Archives); Also Top Confidential File no. 27269 Federal Republic of Germany and Cameroon: Agreement concerning financial cooperation. Signed at Yaoundé on 3 April 1987. vol. 1565-27269, United Nations-Treaty Series (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

⁴¹ Interview with Julius Njua Aghaa, 42 years, Njinikom, 30 September 2008.

⁴² File Cb/1958/1 Annual Report for Bamenda Division, 1957 by Mr. R.J. Elkerton, SDO (NAB).

Map 4.1 Road communication network in Kom



Source: Compiled by author from archival and oral sources

was looking great although I was not the first person who had bought a bicycle in Njinikom. Tailor Ngong Shake and Jua had earlier done wonders by bringing bicycles to Njinikom. When one bought a bicycle he immediately exposed himself to new friends. Those type of friends were only interested in the bicycle rather than the owner. They would like that they should be carried around. When I bought the bicycle the next person who bought was Christopher Fuka who was the houseboy of Rev Fr. Anthony Burke Kennedy. He bought his own in Bamenda. The bicycle also helped me in many ways. For instance, I went to Bamenda faster and bought goods and carried them not on my head but on the bicycle. I usually bought things in Bamenda because they were expensive here in Njinikom.⁴³

Michael's story draws our attention to certain issues. He had apprenticed in brick-laying which meant that after completion not only did he become mobile but belonged to a different status in Kom society. That new status was further confirmed by the fact that he bought a bicycle (*fincha-fi-kfaang*). The bicycle also facilitated his mobility since he could travel to Bamenda easier and faster to buy goods for his business. The fact that he bought the bicycle in Njinikom points to the fact it was the direct impact of

⁴³ Interview with Michael Mbeng, 79 years, Njinikom, 19 September 2008.



Photo 4.2 Michael Mbeng with his new bicycle

Source: Photo taken from his album.

the new and wider road which was responsible for UAC establishing a branch there. Thus, the case of Michael illustrates an example of the connection between technology, spatial mobility and social hierarchy in Kom.

Traditional subsistence agriculture underwent changes as early as 1964, when the Agricultural Department opened an office in Kom. The department started with a small staff that later rose to six local government field overseers in 1965. By the end of 1967 it also included two US government agricultural personnel.⁴⁴ In 1965, that department organised its first agricultural show in which the best harvests and animals won prizes. Many farmers were encouraged to produce more productively, and new tools were distributed to farmers. In line with the modernization policy 'farmers were also taught the improvement of agricultural methods and the development of agricultural leadership as the spirit of co-operation grew'.⁴⁵

Kang was the traditional liquor brewed from fermented corn. It was then ground into powder and cooked. It took at least two days before it was ready for consumption. It was sold to people in traditional calabashes (*a bali*), and began to be served in the new licensed liquor parlours (known as *ndo kang*) in the urban areas linked by the new roads, especially in Njinkom. This meant that *kang* houses already existed in the villages. Significantly the new *kang* houses were located on roadsides and at road junctions. With these liquor houses, a new form of socialization came into being and also the birth of 'urban' areas.

⁴⁴ File no. NW/Qc/b (1979)4, Bk, Annual Report 1979/1980 of the Divisional Delegation of Agriculture, Menchum Division, North West Province, Cameroon (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

⁴⁵ Lf/b(1964)1 Specification of Composition of Kom Bum Council Agricultural Show. Re (NAB).

In 1959, bottled beer reached Njinikom for the first time. The first drinking parlour was known as Congo Bar⁴⁶ and was owned by Vincent Freeboy Mukong. One of the eyewitnesses to this history was James Tubou. According to him, Mukong was born c. 1905 and became one of the first recruits of the German plantations at Bwenga. Mukong worked in Bwenga plantations for more than ten years and when the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) was created in 1946, *Pamol Plantation du Cameroun* (PAMOL) became a separate company (for more on PAMOL, see Konings, 1998). Mukong then went to work with PAMOL.

Like most plantations, the new plantation initially suffered from a lack of labour. To attract labour, the management of PAMOL promoted anyone who recruited labour from his village to a higher rank in the company. He was also paid according to the expenditure which he had incurred in the transportation of the recruits. Freeboy Mukong returned to Kom to recruit people. Fortunately for him, the recruits were physically robust people. He was eventually promoted to the rank of a Headman.

When there was need for more labour he returned to Kom on recruitment expeditions. He did that thrice and the fourth time he was promoted to an Overseer. As an overseer he controlled Headmen and labour. He worked with PAMOL for more than twenty-five before retiring in 1960.

Meanwhile as early as 1955 he was one of the first people who constructed his compound with stones, glass windows and zinc, and then decided to open a drinking parlour in 1959 which was the first in Kom, the Congo Bar. People came from Belo, Fundong and Anyajua to enjoy beer and have fun in the bar. It was because of the road and Mukong's geographical mobility that he was able to build an 'ultra modern compound' following the standards of the time in Kom when the majority of people were still constructing mud houses thatched with grass. It was also why he was able to open his bar selling bottled beer at a time when most people were still used to the traditional liquor, *kang*.

The Congo Bar

It is clear from the story above that Mukong was able to open a bar because he was a recruiter of labour destined for the coastal plantations. So he was geographically very mobile. Importantly, the bar itself came into existence because the road was constructed to link Bamenda and Kom. The introduction of bottled beer was a novelty in Kom because people had been used to drinking only the *kang* which was not bottled. The beer was brewed in Douala in one of the first companies to specialise in beer production, *Les Brasseries du Cameroun* which was founded in 1948 as a subsidiary of the French company *les Brasseries et Glaceries d'Indochine* (Diduk, 1993 and Schler, 2002).

In Kom the beer was given various names, the most common being *muluh mi kfaang*, meaning the beer of newness. People travelled from distance places to Njinikom to buy and consume it because it was more popular and prestigious than *kang*. One of the people who trekked to Njinikom for the consumption of the beer was Isaiah Megne, born in 1922, at Anjin, Kom and who was a long-distance trader to Yola, Tiko, Victoria and Nkongsamba. He claimed that he had first tasted beer in Nkongsamba. He always

⁴⁶ The reasons why this bar was called as such are far from being clear. Congo is a country in Central Africa. In the late 1950s and 1960s Congo orchestra music was one of the best in Africa. Mukong had a gramophone which was producing such music thus, the name Congo Bar.

wondered where he could buy that beer. He was very happy to learn that beer was on sale in Njinikom. He further claim that beer tasted better than *kang* because it had been brewed and brought in from outside.⁴⁷ Those who drank bottled beer felt they were different from other people because it indicated their 'purchasing power'. They felt they were consuming something new, *kfaang*. In a similar situation in Abehema, Nyamnjuh (2008: 151) observed that 'nothing was as prestigious to men of Abehema as beer brewed and capped in the cities. City beer was a happy change from the monotony of local corn beer, *kang*, which to them was definitely inferior to what came from the city firmly capped (...).'

The beer also began to be distributed to other areas of Kom. One of the people who played a significant role in the distribution of the beer was Zacheus Nchindo. He was born in 1940 at Aboh, Kom and completed his primary school in the Cameroon Baptist school in Belo. According to him many people came from the hinterland villages and retailed the beer. They then returned with it to their villages.⁴⁸ The consumption of foreign things in peripheral societies has been noted by Miller (1995: 150) in the following words: 'societies on the periphery of the industrial world often seize readily upon new possibilities of consumption and use them to embody elements of modernity. This points to the fact that these new meanings do not only relate to the commodity and its consumption but also to the consumer's image'. Miller points out that the consumption of foreign commodities enhanced the prestige of the consumer. One of the first scholars to research beer in Cameroon, Diduk (1993: 1-42), has attempted to explain the popularity of bottled beer and concluded that no matter how peripheral a village is in Cameroon, beer consumption is always popular. She also traced the distribution and marketing of the beer (also see, Bryceson, 2007: 267-291; Akyeampong, 2007: 215-231).

One of the offshoots of the Congo Bar was the beginning of the commoditization of sex or the birth of the 'sex industry'. People had to exchange sex for money and hence the origin of 'prostitution' (*agwalla*). Some prostitutes were identified by their dress, speech and cigarettes, with smoking in public an uncommon behavioural pattern among women. Women who pioneered in prostitution were usually those who had travelled out of Kom and felt at the time that they were models of newness, *kfaang*. Funkuin Bihjua Nangensomgu was one such woman. She was born in Kom in 1935. In 1955 she moved out of Kom to Victoria and Tiko in coastal Cameroon, perhaps in search of a job or just for adventure. In 1960 she returned to Njinikom with new luxury goods such as tobacco, cigarettes, matches and snuff. In addition, her manner of dress was unconventional. She never married and when the Congo Bar was opened she spent hours drinking with men and crossing her legs, things that were reserved only for men in Kom. Unmarried men wooed her to satisfy their 'carnal desires'.⁴⁹ Other women moved to Njinikom and followed her example.

Although the bar marked the birth of prostitution, there was no association for prostitutes or special accommodation quarters meant for such women, as Balandier

⁴⁷ Interview with Isaiah Megne, 86 years, Anjin, Kom 14 June 2008.

⁴⁸ Interview with Zacheus Nchindo, 68 years, Aboh, 30 November 2008.

⁴⁹ The information about the beginnings of prostitution in Kom and Funkuin Bihjua Nangensomgu was gathered from many oral testimonies. Some of the people like Ngong Shakes, Batholomew Yisa were eyewitnesses to the beginnings and growth of prostitution in Kom, especially Njinikom.

(1955: 145-146) had observed with elite women in Congo-Brazzaville, who enjoyed great prestige and were not labelled 'prostitutes' but 'hetaire'. Those type of women set up mutual associations through which they came to the help of members in time of need such as death funerals and accidents. Sicot (1964: 132) has also shown that prostitutes in Ghana and Nigeria have professional unions. Leith-Ross (1939: 267-268), while studying prostitution among the Ibo of Eastern Nigeria, echoed that it was 'merely a new calling like any other and they became prostitutes as reasonably and as self righteously as they would have become typists or telephone girls'. The situation in Kom in the beginning did not suggest that the prostitutes were a self-conscious united group, but that social change was on the way. The first women did new things like drinking with men late into the night, smoking and crossing their legs while sitting.⁵⁰



Photo 4.3 The Congo Bar in its old state
[Photo by author]



Photo 4.4 The Congo bar almost beyond recognition. Only a coca-cola advert is hanging on a post to show that it was once a bar.
[Photo by author]

⁵⁰ Ibid.

The new social and economic change in Kom, in part a function of the new roads, is only one aspect of the story. The completion of the Bamenda-Kom road led to the opening of travel agencies like 'Guarantee', 'Armour Mezam' and 'Patience'. Their bus services transported people from Kom to Bamenda, Bafoussam, Limbe, Yaoundé and Douala without stopping in Bamenda anymore. Goats, chickens, plantains, bananas, corn, beans, potatoes, and carrots were transported and sold in Bamenda and beyond.

Apart from the travel agencies which came to Kom as a result of the tarred road, Belo, Njinikom and Fundong became more cosmopolitan and multi-ethnic (Appiah, 2006). Many people came from neighbouring Fondoms and settled in these core areas for business purposes. Most of the people were traders who bought merchandise from Bamenda and retailed it in Kom. The activities of these people were further supported by the municipal councils. In Belo, Njinikom and Fundong daily markets were constructed by municipal councils. This was a change from the traditional markets that used to be held only on particular days of the week.

Trade contributed to the mobility of Kom people. The traders travelled more widely, buying from Bamenda, Douala, and Yaoundé to sell in Kom. The resulting competition led to the decline of some older businesses. One such businessman was John Ngam. He was born in 1932 at Itinifoinbi, village, Kom. At the early age of 21 he started travelling to distant places with his uncle carrying and selling a variety of goods that ranged from kola nuts to chickens. In the late 1950s he became a watch repairer in Bamenda after a period of apprenticeship. Four years later with a little capital he started a mini-supermarket at Njinikom which he called MONOPRIX, where he sold assorted goods such as aladdin lamps, zinc, beer and household equipment. In the late 1980s he was the sole distributor of beer in Njinikom, Fundong and Belo and also employed over twenty-five people. He also bought vehicles with which he transported goods to and from Bamenda. Although the road was good for business, it also ruined his business because it enabled other traders to go to Bamenda easily to buy goods and thus compete against him.⁵¹

The road enabled peoples to move out of villages to the roadsides. Consequently, rural livelihoods were altered, and Kom was on its way to urbanism. Heintze and Oppen (2008: 13) have demonstrated how the existence of new roads often transformed whole regions, sometimes with ambiguous results. They also pointed to '(...) the road network's creation of regional and national spaces with new centers (...)', which 'gave rise to significant changes'. Kom was not an exception. *Kfaang* was not always 'positive' but also had its negative sides. And the roads did not altogether displace the old pathways. In 1998, despite the fact that most of Kom country had newer roads there were still bridle-paths and tracks leading from village to village.⁵²

Conclusion

To underline the importance and impact of roads, this Chapter started by reviewing the justification for widening the road under the supervision of the colonial administration. For the latter, the roads were intended to tap labour and raw materials in the Bamenda

⁵¹ Interview with Isidore Ngam, 77 years, Njinikom, 23 April 2009.

⁵² File AB 76, Report by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Trusteeship Council of the United Nations on Administration of the Cameroons under United Kingdom Trusteeship for the year 1953 (NAB).

hinterlands. This was the official justification for the road. But Kom people perceived and understood it as something that eased their mobility. To them it was also *kfaang*, the new thing and by extension newness. They welcomed it and participated in its construction. The main trunk had feeders. The consequences were great. The road accelerated geographical mobility of the people and also to the introduction of new ways of thinking and doing things like the beer parlours and the commoditization of sex. Freeboy Mukong emerged and represented a new stratum of entrepreneurs made possible by the need for wage labour. The road, the Congo Bar, prostitution and the movement of people to the roadsides as well as the coming into being of new beer parlours constituted what we might call here urbanization. This urbanization was facilitated by the road and movement of people like Freeboy to the plantations. Plantations in its own right represented modernisation. The two – modernisation and urbanization – accelerated social change. The people who moved out of their interior villages to Njinikom and the roadsides were on their way to becoming urbanites. They now lived in a state of transition from rural to urban life. The next chapter will turn its attention to the first motor car which was introduced to the area by a Kom person in 1955 and how it became a focal point of new social changes.

Motor vehicle (*afue'm a kfaang*)

Introduction

Chapter Four examined the construction of a new motor road linking Kom to Bamenda and its consequences for Kom society. This Chapter focuses on the coming of bicycles, cars and lorries to Kom, and their combined impact on Kom people and social structure. To this end, it argues that although bicycles and lorries reached Kom within roughly a decade of each other in the 1940s and 1950s, and although they each variously facilitated Kom mobility, motor vehicles had the greater impact because they accelerated mass movement of people and goods. The Chapter also argues that the use and ownership of motor vehicles in Kom contributed to enhanced prestige and social status for individuals and groups in the short and long term.

According to Gewald et al. (2009), '(...) the motor-vehicle is arguably the single most important factor for change in Africa in the twentieth century, a factor which has thus far, been neglected in research. Yet its impact extends across the totality of human existence; from ecological devastation to economic advancement, from cultural transformation to political change, through to a myriad of others'. Gewald (2002: 257-285) also shows how the introduction of the motor vehicle transformed Zambian society. He describes the various means of transportation in Zambia, from distance and head load, bicycles to the motor vehicle. He examines the socio-economic impact of the introduction of the motor vehicle in Zambia. In another paper he examines the relationship between the motor vehicle, missionaries and mobility amongst the Herero of Namibia. According to Hopkins (1973: 196), by 1940 French West Africa alone had about 10,000 vehicles. The expansion of motor vehicles in the British West Africa was faster: By the 1920s the vehicles imported to the Gold Coast and Nigeria were more than double the number and twice the tonnage of those entering the French colonies. These works provide a good model with which to study the motor vehicle elsewhere in Africa. The works provide snapshots and further lead to us to sharper ways of understanding the history of the motor vehicle in relation to geographical mobility, technology and social change. The Chapter specifically uses Kopytoff's concept of the 'cultural biography of things' (Kopytoff, 1986: 67-91).

This Chapter includes the biography of the vehicle, of the vehicle owner and the family history of those who appropriated this transport technology. What was the relationship between the vehicle as *kfaang* and Kom society? As with any other technology which when introduced into the society develops a regime around it, so too with the vehicle. What was that regime which developed around the vehicle? As a start,

one can say that the vehicle co-opted a kinship which included those who worked in the vehicle. How was the vehicle accepted, translated and domesticated by Kom people? As a technology, how did it affect the physical mobility of Kom people? How did that particular technology of motor vehicles affect geographical mobility? What did the motor vehicle mean to Kom people and how did they see it? What did the vehicle as a specific technological symbol represent?

The Chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the introduction of the motor vehicle to Kom; the person who bought the vehicle and the network in which he was involved. The second section examines the vehicle and its depiction, while the third discusses the 'domestication' of the vehicle by Kom people. The fourth section examines the sitting arrangements and running commentaries of the passengers, while the fifth part examines the impact of the motor vehicle on Kom society with particular attention to the creation of new social hierarchies and mobility which developed around the vehicle.

The motor vehicle in Kom

In June 1955, the first motor vehicle, bought and owned by a Kom man, James Nsah Neng Ndai, entered Kom amidst great fascination. The fascination was not so much because it was the first time that a motor vehicle had entered Kom but because it was a Kom man who had bought the vehicle. The lineage of the owner, *itinalah*, celebrated this achievement by one of their illustrious sons with a group photograph.

James Nsah Neng Ndai was born in Kom around 1913.¹ He was the only son in a family of five girls. To escape the pressure of being responsible to his nephews he migrated to the coast where he anticipated earning money. His decision to move was because Kom is a matrilineal society in which uncles and not biological fathers own the children. The belief is that only women know the true fathers of the children (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982; Vubo, 2005: 145-182). The role of the father is to provide farm land for the wives, and a piece of land on which the male children can build their houses. Because of this fact Ndai decided to go to the coast to earn money and accumulate capital for desirable commodities.

He moved in the late 1930s to Kombone village in Kumba Division. As the first Kom man in Kombone, he acquired farm land on which he cultivated coffee and cocoa in large quantities. As the farms became larger he started employing labour and eventually had a labour force of more than thirty people. He bought his Austin lorry in Lagos in 1955. Lagos at the time was the economic capital of British Southern Cameroons because the British administered that territory as part of Nigeria. He died in 1998 and was buried at the Njinikom Catholic mission cemetery because he was a Christian and it is believed in the Christian circles that when a Christian dies he should be buried in the church cemetery. He was survived by three daughters.²

Anna Bih Nsah who was married to James for forty years before his death explained how her husband could buy a vehicle in 1955 in the following words:

I knew my husband just when the missionaries came to stay at the mission, here in Njinikom (1927). We got married traditionally and he took me to the coast to a place known as Kombone (...) My husband had seven large cocoa farms and two coffee farms. In those farms he employed about thirty-

¹ Interview with Yindo Mbah, Njinikom, 12 September 2008.

² Interview with Ayeah Nsom, 24 June 2008, Atuilah, Njinikom.

five people and some of his nephews were supervising the workers (...) Because of that wealth, Kom people around Kombone mission area where we lived became jealous. Oh, it was not only the wealth; he was also influential in many important things since he was a prince (...) he fell sick for a very long time and at one point was taken home for traditional medical help. During his absence, I was in charge of the farms and our children. I was constantly afraid that he would die. I do not know whether he was poisoned or not. In his absence we harvested more than fifty bags of cocoa and coffee. One day he came back to Kombone. It was a great day and everybody in the house was happy. He was also happy with the harvest. In that meeting, he informed us that he would want to sell all the crops harvested, the farms and the house (...) He would use the money, to go to Lagos and buy a vehicle. The vehicle will help Kom people moving out of Kom to distant places. The people will no longer trek. Everybody in the house accepted this proposal. He had so much money from the sales.

(...) one day in the month of June (*njong njoinsi*) my husband arrived with a vehicle. The vehicle was not what you are seeing now. It was made of plank and had a tarpaulin. The vehicle arrived on the eve of Njinikom market day-Saturday. He presented the vehicle to Kom public on that market day. That day was a great day in Njinikom and the whole of Kom. People whispered that Nsah has done something great; others said that the vehicle was frightening while others vowed that they will never enter it. The next day was a great family feast in the compound with his family and a photograph was taken.

His driver was a Yoruba man. Unfortunately, I have forgotten his name. He did a very bad job because he was not always accountable for the finances of the vehicle. My husband decided to employ a motor boy to be in charge of collecting the money. This man was Boniface Ngoh who was the nephew of his friend, Ambrose Beng, at Kombone. It was at the time of Boniface that we could have meaningful finances. The Yoruba driver left and the next driver was a Kom prince, Marx Nkwain. After sometime, Boniface left for the coast and another motor boy was employed. In the year of Cameroon Independence the vehicle had an accident at the bridge between Bambui and Babanki and was damaged beyond repairs. That was the end of the vehicle.³

The story told by Ndai's widow indicates that her husband was a wealthy man. He had many cash crop farms. He had workers in his employ. His decision to buy a vehicle was informed by his ill health, from which he recovered. He decided to sell his farms and the house. By buying that vehicle he became the first person to buy a transport lorry in Kom. Consequently, we could contend that to appropriate this medium of technology wealth was one of the pre-requisites. The fact that he had the wealth and labour showed some sort of power.

The story also shows something different from Benedicta's experience and similar to Anyway Ndichia Timti. The former became important because she went to school while James and Anyway did not, but took a different road. Their status changed like Benedicta's although their difference was clear, one went to school and the others did not. That might illustrate different ways by which social hierarchies were created.

It is intriguing that he bought the vehicle in Lagos, with the aid of a Kom man, Cosmas Nchouji, who was about to complete studying photography. Nchouji was born in 1919 to William Fulmai who was one of the earliest people to settle in Njinikom. His mother's name was Nabi Akungha. He finished elementary education in St. Anthony's School, Njinikom. He obtained his Standard Six Certificate in 1938. After that he went to Tiko where he worked in the plantations for two years. He saved some money and started studying photography. He was not satisfied with his terms of apprenticeship. He therefore migrated to Enugu, Ibadan and finally in Lagos where he completed the profession of photography in 1955. Back in Kom he was the first photographer. He was

³ Interview with Annah Bih Nsah, widow and wife of James Nsah Neng Ndai, the person who owned a vehicle in Kom, 30th June 2008.

the person who accommodated Nsah in Lagos and first took him to Kom community in Lagos and finally to where the Austin lorries were sold. According to Nchouji, Nsah bought the vehicle for £2,500 in the market for second hand goods at Ikoyi, Lagos. Henry Kini, who by then was the Director of Customs and Ndiyah, an Inspector of Police, all from Kom, helped him with the transaction and to register the vehicle.⁴

The help which was rendered by Cosmas, Henry and Ndiyah to James in Lagos and the short history of James's history before buying the vehicle might fit into the biography of things develop by Kopytoff. According to him,

The biography of a vehicle in Africa would reveal a wealth of cultural data: the way it was acquired, how and from whom the money was assembled to pay for it, the relationship of the seller to the buyer, the uses to which the vehicle is regularly put, the identity of its most frequent passengers and of those who borrow it, the frequency of borrowing, the garages to which it is taken and the owner's relations to the mechanics and drivers, the movement of the vehicle from hand to hand over the years, and in the end, when the vehicle collapses, the final disposition of its remains (...) (Kopytoff, 1986: 67-68).

The story of the vehicle may not paint a full photo of its biography but it at least tells some it. For instance, we are at a loss regarding the registration of the vehicle. Who helped in the handover of the vehicle? How did the owner get the vehicle documents? Answers to all these questions might give to us a fuller understanding of the biography of the vehicle.

The vehicle arrived during the period of political activism in the British Southern Cameroon. In the 1950s there was a demand for independence by the British and French colonies in Africa. Kom participated in the ongoing political activism in the territory because it was in the contested territory of the British Cameroons. In 1954 the first indigenous political party, KNC, was established, and a branch was readily formed in Kom with Joseph Ndong Nkwain being its leader. In 1955 the party split and the KNDP was formed with Augustine Ngom Jua being its leader in Kom. So the two major political parties in the British Southern Cameroons had branches in Kom. Technology shows and implies progress in the society so the politics of the region if carefully scrutinised, also shows how the society progresses. The vehicle therefore showed how much of progress Kom people had made. It might have been coincidental occurrences but it is important to see the connection between technology (vehicle) and societal progress in Kom. The vehicle also showed how *kfaang* or technology was always in the minds of the people as a mark of progress and signified the way forward. The search for independence showed how the people were forward-looking and was accompanied by optimism as people were eager to see a new future. At the same time, the first vehicle bought by a Kom man entered Kom in 1955.

The vehicle and photo

In the field most informants could recognise the people in the photograph and actually confirmed that it was *idyi-al*, meaning pride or showing one very proud. Michael Mbeng was one member of the lineage in the photograph who was still *ff* and that the lineage which was one of the founding lineages in Kom beca alive. According to him the photograph, although meant for the family members, also included people like him because his good friend Kukwa was a member of the Itinilah lineage. He further

⁴ Interview with Cosmas Nchouji, 89 years, Njinikom, 17 September 2008.



Photo 5.1 The vehicle

Source: Obtained from the collection of Cosmas Nchojie

claimed that on that day many of the people of that lineage could be heard saying aloud that the vehicle belonged to the family and members of other lineages who wanted to have their own vehicle should make friends with them.⁵ The story narrated by Michael was repeated by Cosmas Nchouji, the photographer, who was part of the lineage.⁶ He went further than Michael and said: 'Kom people could be heard all over Kom area saying that Nsah has bought their vehicle which will save them trekking. Most people, believed and felt that the vehicle was for Kom (...).'⁷ Like Fuh (2009) who has demonstrated how prestige was manifested and experienced in Old Town Bamenda among the youths, the people in Kom gathered in the photograph and from the oral sources gathered so far, showed that it was more for prestigious reasons.

The meanings associated with the vehicle by the majority of Kom people indicate that they shared almost the same view of the vehicle. It was not only the members of the owner's lineage but also other lineages who felt that the vehicle belonged to them. Regarding that type of reasoning Pinch & Bijker (1989: 30) have stated:

The key requirement for social construction of technology is that all members of a certain social group share the same set of meanings attached to a specific artifact. In deciding which social groups are relevant, we must first ask whether the artifact has any meaning at all for the members of the social group under investigation. Obviously, the social group of consumers or users of the artifact fulfills this

⁵ Interview with Michael Mbeng, Njinikom, 14, 15, 16 and 21 September 2008.

⁶ Interview with Cosmas Nchouji, Njinikom, 25 September 2008.

⁷ Ibid.

requirement. Another question to be posed is whether provisionally defined social group is homogeneous with respect to the meanings given to the artifact.

It is not important here to search for the homogeneity of the group. But if we take these scholars seriously, it means that the artefact which to Kom was *kfaang* was accepted and made relevant in their context. We could therefore also contend that the photo was a symbol and measure of prestige and status. The people valorised the vehicle because they saw it as something which would facilitate their geographical mobility. It would save them from trekking.

The next photograph (Photo 5.1) is from the family album of the widow of James Nsah and it has been reproduced here with the permission of the family. Sitting in the middle with a long white hat and putting on sandals with socks is the vehicle owner. To his left hand is his wife and their three little children. To his right is a Catholic monk, Rev. Brother Denis Ngoh. To the left of his wife is Joachim Ngwiih, his father-in-law. The other people in the photograph are his house maids and relations. This photo was taken when he officially got married in the Roman Catholic Church. The photo was taken in front of the parish office and from the way the vehicle owner is sitting in the photo one can guess that he was a rich man. Of course it was because he was rich that he bought a vehicle. Appropriating a particular *kfaang*, technology therefore is power. His power is shown in that photograph and his interaction with the church. This is quite symbolic because the Catholic Church was another element of modernisation and social change in Kom.



Photo 5.2 The vehicle owner and his 'family'

Source: From the collection of Nsah's album

The ‘domestication’ of newness (technology, *kfaang*)

Scholars over the years have attempted to define the meaning of ‘domestication’. Barker et al. (2005) argue that ‘domestication’ is a process in which a technology changes its status from outrageous novelty to an aspect of everyday life which is taken for granted. Van Binsbergen and Geschiere (2005: 9-48) maintain that a domesticated object is a part of the physical world that has been defined, classified and appropriated by humans. Latour (1987) demonstrates how social context and technical content are both essential to a proper understanding of technology. That approach was later re-formulated by Lehtonen (2003), who described the initial period of living with new technology and the way the technology needs to be fitted into pre-existing technological and human relationships. Pantza (1997) referring to social history considers how various technologies are domesticated and relevant in everyday life. Geschiere & Rowlands (1996) also demonstrate different trajectories in which modernity could be domesticated. Smits (2006) and Schank et al. (1999), elaborate on the taming of technology in the daily life of human societies.

In general, the above scholars see ‘domestication’ as an approach that describes the processes by which innovations, especially new technologies, are appropriated by users, and are integrated into everyday life and adapted to daily routines. Kom did this with ‘their’ vehicle. Domestication is thus both the practical and the symbolic adoption and use of technologies in which these two elements – the meaning of things, and their materiality – are also important in the understanding of how technologies become part of everyday life. This section pays attention to the motor vehicle as it was domesticated amongst Kom people.

The coming of the motor vehicle as described by Cosmas was totally rejected by some people who were frightened of it. These people also rejected the first camera which he had introduced to Kom from Lagos in 1954. According to him there was a ‘wild’ rumour circulated by some detractors that if he photographed someone, and previously the person would have lived for another five years, after being photographed the person would only live for two. He concluded by saying that he did not blame the people because they were simply ignorant.⁸ He then migrated to Ndop, a neighbour of Kom, where he established a photo studio. With the formation of the KNDP in August 1955, he was employed as the party photographer to take photos of Fons in the Bamenda Grasslands. It was only then that people became less suspicious of photography. Just as people became frightened and suspicious of photography so also was the case with the vehicle. Cosmas also claims that a minority of people spread rumours about the vehicle. According to them it could cause madness because of its speed which ‘caused their brains to be turning’. The step in photography and vehicle illustrates how a technological artefact or *kfaang* could be rejected outright by people who did not see its relevance and usefulness. The Kom therefore found it difficult to appropriate a camera because they had never understood it. The vehicle was different because only a minority rejected it. Overall, it shows how *kfaang* could only be appropriated when it was relevant and understood by people.

Further appropriation of the vehicle was demonstrated in the names Kom gave the vehicle and its parts. The motor vehicle produced a sound which was similar to a

⁸ Interview with Cosmas Nchouji, Njinikom, 15 June 2007.

carpenter bee known in Kom language as *afu'em* – a carpenter bee. This bee could be very destructive to the roof of a house because it bores holes into the timber rafters. It stings but also produces honey. The *afu'em* metaphor therefore suggests Kom understanding of the vehicle. Since the sound produced by the vehicle was similar to the *afu'em* Kom decided to call it *afu'em a, kfaang*, meaning the carpenter bee of newness. The carpenter bee also produce honey and at the same time stings. The vehicle by the same token is quite 'sweet' for lack of a better word. The fact that the bee also stings can be noticed from the way the vehicle had an accident as we have been told by the widow of the vehicle owner on the eve of Cameroon's independence.

Furthermore, other parts of the vehicle received more appropriation from Kom. The accelerator was known as *nyoh-na-fa,ah* which meant 'lighted with the foot' since the car was accelerated using the foot. In parts of Central and East Africa vehicles were likened to vampires by the people, perhaps because Christianity had not struck roots into the places but more because in their midst vampires were like the first motor vehicles in terms of their speed. The motor vehicles were also likened to vampires because of the colour red. Vampires were used to sucking blood which was red. The colour of the petrol was reddish (White, 1997: 436-460). The parallel of this today is seen in the way many societies in Africa and Bamenda Grasslands have come to label the mobile telephone. To Kom it is *ficha fi kfaang* (the wire of newness). The significance of such naming is that people almost immediately know how to construct these technologies to best suit them and their environments. Today it is interesting to see people repairing cell phones as in the years past they repaired vehicles without any formal training.

The history of foreign objects as narrated by Nsah's widow approximates what Kopytoff (1986: 67) calls the biography of things. According to him 'Biography of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure. For example, in situations of culture contact, they can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects – as of alien ideas – is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use ... Following the Kom experience, the car was adopted with various alias names that were given to it.

In addition to these local perceptions, Kom people christened the vehicle *chimbom*. This meant 'God should guide me', an instance of the impact of Christianity which entered Kom fully in 1927. According to Nsah's widow the epithet was evidence that her husband did not feel secure among his people, and because he had been sick for a very long time that was why he accepted the name.⁹ The aliasing of the vehicle as such received shaper parallel in Mankon. Here when the Fon of Mankon, Ndefru, began the business of supplying food to the Bamenda prisons he bought a vehicle in 1938 and called it *Aghanwi* (God's Gift) (Fo Angwafor, 2009: 6).

Those who were the first to own vehicles in their localities were prone to dedicate the vehicles to God. Writing his autobiography, Fo Angwafor, maintains that 'we name the lorry *Aghanwi*; we were the first people to own a lorry in the whole of the Bamenda region at the time' (Fo Angwafor, 2009: 6). The naming of vehicles with a particular focus on God has also attracted scholarly attention in West Africa. Writing about the inscriptions on vehicles in Ghana, van der Geest (2009: 253-293) argued that these inscriptions were literary but at the same time metaphorical. They contain information

⁹ Interview with Adiensa Helen Nsah, Njinikom, 30th May 2007.

of all sorts and tell the history of the vehicle owners and their families and other people. The religious significance of the inscription on vehicles shows how man struggles to offer to God what he thinks he cannot control as well as what he thinks signifies goodness and progress. In Ghana, Verrips & Meyer (2001: 152-184) have studied 'The God Never Fails', the vehicle that belongs to Kwaku. Therefore what was going on in Kom and Bamenda Grasslands was paralleled elsewhere in Africa as the Ghana example illustrates.

From the above, it could be said that for any type of technology to make an impact in a society the people have to adopt and adapt it to their needs. They have to tame the new and 'wild' technology by conferring familiar names from their history and culture. The motor vehicle had just illustrated that perception in Kom. The way people sat and the comments that ran across the passengers were interesting and relevant to us here.

Sitting arrangements and running commentaries

Passengers sat on benches and had to look backwards instead of looking forward as it is usually the norm. People had to climb a few rungs before finally getting their seats in the vehicle because of the way these types of vehicle were constructed. Some scholars have identified these types of vehicles in British West Africa and Cameroon Grassland. For instance, Jordan (1978: 35) observes that

(...) this type of lorry was fashionable in British West Africa in the 1950s. The lorries were built from trucks that were no more serviceable for long distance transport. The floor of the lorry was left intact, the roof closed and lowered and the sides and rear slats removed except those up to a height of about 60 centimetres from the floor. Pieces of the wooden planks were laid across the remaining slats to form benches. People climbed in from the sides and sat facing backward.

Durrell (1954: 12), who was in Bafut in the Bamenda Grasslands in the mid-1940s to collect and study different types of tropical insects describes the vehicle in which he travelled in the following words: 'The lorry that arrived to take me up to the mountains was worse than any that I have seen before: it tottered on the borders of senile decay. It stood there on buckled wheels, wheezing and gasping with exhaustion from having to climb up the gentle slope to the camp, and I consigned myself and my loads to it with some trepidation (...).' Jordan provides details of how the vehicle was constructed to accommodate the sitting positions of passengers. Durrell states that the vehicle in which he was to travel had outlived its usefulness. The vehicle in Kom therefore did not differ greatly from its counterparts elsewhere in British West Africa.

With regard to the sitting arrangements, the way people sat in the vehicle was far from being normal but it also depended on the way the lorry was constructed. It took energy out of people to climb into the vehicle. Inside the vehicle people had to sit with their luggage consisting of goats, tins of oil, bags of corn, chickens and boxes of dresses. They sat so that their chins touched their knees. One of the people who travelled with the vehicle was Bartholomew Nkwain. He was born in 1944 at Njinikom, He underwent his elementary education in St. Anthony's School, Njinikom, and in 1964 travelled to the plantations. From the plantations, he went to Kumba where he worked with *Brasseries du Cameroun* till 1990 when he went on retirement. According to him,

Chimambom at one time could vehicle more than 20 people. These people were carried along with goods which included goats, salt, kerosene, cigarettes and palm oil. So people were not separated from the goods as it is today. When the lorry was running two things were noticed: the first thing was that

you could quickly notice those who had entered the lorry for their first time in the commentaries they were making. Most of the time, they were complaining that they could see objects passing very quickly. Some were vomiting and this showed how it was their first time to enter the vehicle. The second issue was that whenever the gear was to be changed one will hear the driver shouting 'we-dg-e'. The motorboy who had a piece of wood will place it behind the tyres. As the lorry was climbing he will be running following the vehicle until the lorry will finish climbing the hill. Oh, I forgot another one. You will hear the elderly who used to trek to Bamenda frequently pointing at places where the footpaths existed. This was to show off that they were not going to Bamenda for their first time but that they knew where they were going. Now those who were going for the first time will immediately create some friendship and while in Bamenda they will be directed to where they were going. The sitting positions were interesting. Those who sat in front with the driver paid differently and higher amount than those who sat behind mixed with goods but paid lower.¹⁰

From our informant, the sitting arrangements also reflected status. Those occupied the front seat with the driver had to pay a higher fare than those in the 'popular' section. For instance, if the transport fare to Bamenda was £2 then the person who opted to occupy the front seat of the vehicle paid an extra £1. The collector sat by the door with a bag tied to his waist to collect fares from the passengers. Then there was the popular side in which people sat with their goods and barely squatted on the benches with their chins resting on their knees. There were benches which carried averagely about eight people per bench. There was no carriage and so all the goods were put inside the vehicle. The motorboy (*ighiibii moto* meaning the dog of the vehicle) now was the last person sitting on the tail board of the vehicle. The African playwright, Soyinka (1965: 4), has captured the sitting arrangements. According to him while in the vehicle the passenger turned his back to where he was coming from.

The most frequent commentaries came from two categories of passengers: Those who were entering the vehicle for their first time and those who were already used to the footpaths on their way to Bamenda. Those people who entered the vehicle for their first time were singing mostly church songs while the vehicle was in motion. Those who had been to Bamenda by footpaths were heard and seen pointing the paths which the road had deviated – the places which they used to move on foot and also places which they rested while trekking to Bamenda. Amongst these two groups of people were also people who did not know their way in Bamenda and they needed the driver or motor boy to direct them.¹¹

The motor vehicle in society

This section attempts to examine some of the consequences of the introduction of the motor vehicle into the society. To say that the vehicle accelerated geographical mobility is to state the obvious. But it will not be too obvious to state the effect of geographical mobility in relations to trekking. Motor vehicles made it possible for geographical mobility to increase. The plantations in the coast of Cameroon attracted labour which was recruited from the Grasslands, including Kom. After the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 the CDC was established as a statutory corporation by a Nigerian government ordinance in 1946 to operate former German plantations, mainly in Victoria and Kumba Divisions.¹²

¹⁰ Interview with Bartholomew Nkwain, Atuilah, 64 years, Njinikom, 24 June 2008.

¹¹ Interview with Ngong Tim, Njinikom, 19 June 2008.

¹² CO 936/418 International Trusteeship Affairs in British Cameroons (PRO).

These plantations attracted many people from Kom who travelled there to seek employment opportunities. Konings (2001: 174) has studied the plantation economy in Cameroon and has provided revealing statistics regarding labour from the Bamenda Grasslands from 1926 to 1990. Between 1956 and 1959 there were 3,722 Kom people in the plantations (Ardener et al. 1960: 204-205)¹³ in a labour force of 43,000.¹⁴ It is not clear as to how many people from Kom were already in the plantations before the vehicle was introduced but it seems very possible that the increase recorded between 1956 and 1959 can be attributed to the motor vehicle which was largely responsible for the increase in geographical mobility.

Another impact of the motor vehicle fell on carriers who were employed to carry the load of government officials on tour. Kom people were prominent among numerous carriers in the British Southern Cameroons. The D.O. for Bamenda, G.V. Evans, stated that: 'great eagerness has been displayed during the last two months for carrier work which is a good sign at least that the work is purely voluntary. To give only one example, 80 carriers were required from the Fon of Bikom and 120 arrived and the rejected ones were upset at not being selected'.¹⁵

The next report showed the impact of the vehicle on the wages of carriers. The employment of the carriers' wages that were charged in carrying the luggage of the government officials became a matter of concern to the British colonial officials in the British Southern Cameroons. On 17 August 1955, the Acting Commissioner of Southern Cameroons, R.R. Cordale, wrote to the Resident of special Duty in Bamenda:

<p>To: The Resident, Special Duty, Bamenda The District Officer, Wum, The District Officer, Nkambe The District Officer Mamfe The District Officer, Kumba, The District Officer, Victoria.</p>	<p>From P. 649, No. 91.49/614, Commissioner's Office, Buea, Cameroons, Under UN Trusteeship, 17 August 1955</p>
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¹³ Cameroon Development Cooperation, Annual Reports, 1956-1959 (CDC) also vehicle very important statistics and were produced annually by the management of the corporation. In the years 1956-1959, these figures were often produced in December showing the total number of labour and from which tribe it came from. This exercise seems to have started petering out when the British Cameroon joined the French Cameroon in October 1961. Reasons are still unclear.

¹⁴ CO 936/412 International Trusteeship Annual Reports for British Cameroons, 1957-1959(PRO).

¹⁵ Report on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province for the Quarter Ending, 30 June 1955 by G.V. Evans, (NAB).

CARRIERS RATE

As a result of the decision, on the 9th May 1955 of the Executive Council to adopt the recommendations of Southern Cameroons Wages Committee, it has become necessary to adjust the rates of pay of carriers

2. With respect from 1st May, 1955, the rates of pay will be set out in the schedule below:
(Sgd) R.B. Cordale for the Commissioner of Southern

<u>Area</u>	<u>Labour group</u>	<u>Carrier rate/uploaded</u>	<u>carrier rate/loaded</u>
Victoria	6	2/d	2/10d
Kumba	6	2/5d	2/10d
Mamfe	7	2/16d	2/20d
Bamenda	8	1/7d	1/10d
Wum	8	1/7d	1/10d
Nkambe	8	1/7d	1/10d

Source File no. Ad.342/1955, Vehicle carriers and wages in British Southern Cameroons (NAB).

The implementation of wages to carriers was not the normal practice. Usually the labour to carry the goods of the government officials was supplied by the chiefs. With the introduction of the motor vehicle it was not possible for it to reach all the corners of Southern Cameroon or better still where the government officials could reach. It therefore became incumbent on the colonial administration to adjust to the growing need of transporting the goods of their governors on trek. Consequently, it was necessary to adjust the wages of the carriers. From the letter above it is illustrative enough to show that the wages were not uniform enough. In the Victoria, Kumba, Mamfe areas where the motor vehicle was first introduced, the wages were slightly different from those of Bamenda, Wum(Kom) and Nkambe area which were much larger and had a difficult topography.

To show the effect that the introduction of the motor vehicle had on carriers, one year later the Commissioner of southern Cameroons wrote another letter No. 2145/626 titled 'Carrier rate'.¹⁶ He wrote in the following words:

No. 46/686 Commissioner's Office Buea, Cameroon Under UN Trusteeship 19 TH April 1966	The Resident, Special Duty, Bamenda The District Officer, Wum, The District Officer, Nkambe The District Officer Mamfe The District Officer, Kumba
<u>CARRIERS RATE</u>	
I refer to my letter No. 9149/614 of 17 th August 1955. Since the revision of the General and Special Labour Grade Rates with effect from 1 st Aril, 1966, it has become necessary to adjust the carrier rates for the six divisions.	
2. With effect from 1 st April, 1966, these rates are as follows:	

¹⁶ File No.F. 150 Rc/c1947/1, Government vehicles, use charges and Careers (NAB); For the original letters see appendix I.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Carrier rate/unloaded</u>	<u>Carrier rate/loaded</u>
Victoria	2/10d	2/8d
Kumba	2/7d	2/-d
Mamfe	2/4d	2/9d
Bamenda	1/9d	2/-d
Wum	1/9d	2/-d
Nkambe	1/9d	2/-d

Source: File no. Ad.342/1955, Carriers and Wages in British Southern Cameroons (NAB).

The figures in the report miss out one point. They treated carriers without making mention of Kom which was found in the Bamenda Division. During the fieldwork it was testified that some Kom worked as carriers. One of them was Janarius Ngongtum. He was born in February 1922, and he used to control a carrier gang of more than 25 people. He claimed that, 'it was very interesting but at the same time many people were bound to lose their jobs when the vehicle was introduced. Many of the people did not have their normal wages and many of them abandoned the job and went to the plantations.'¹⁷

If the intention of some technologies was to connect places and people then the introduction of the motor vehicle did just that. The *Ngwin falla* and the *Twang Kwabeilla* and *Ngwin Mbzingou*, places where Kom people used to go when they trekked to Bamenda, Nkongsamba, and Victoria, were cut off since vehicles never passed through such places but took only one of the new roads. The people and the resting points in those places were more connected to the new road. One of the people who used the footpath and also used the widened road was Nathalia Koukou. She was born in 1921 and she grew up in Kom. Her husband, Peter Nkwain, fought in the Second World War and after demobilization he was employed in Bamenda as a gardener in the D.O.'s residence. Koukou visited him two years after the war, that is in 1948, passing by the normal footpaths mentioned above. In 1955 she testified that while in a vehicle she need only look across to see the footpaths of *Twang Kwabeilla* and *Ngwin Mbzingou*.¹⁸ Writing in 1949, the Resident of the Cameroon Province indicated that some parts of that road had been deviated.¹⁹ It is interesting to bear in mind that these places were never completely disconnected, as casual observation showed that there were bridle paths connected to the main road.

Thanks to the vehicle, people who migrated to distant places were able to return home much faster. According to Cosmas, 'I was able to visit Bamenda twice a month but before the vehicle I could do so only once in three months',²⁰ an indication of just how much distance had effectively been compressed with the introduction of the vehicle. Formally, it took Kom people at least two to three days to reach Bamenda depending from which part of Kom the person was coming. If the person was coming from Njinikom, he or she would spend the first night at Kedjom Keku, and the second

¹⁷ Interview with Ngongtum Janarius, Sho, 76 years, Kom, 13 April 2008.

¹⁸ Interview with Nathalia Koukou, Njinikom, 87 years, 7 August 2008.

¹⁹ File Cg 219/29 Native Administrative roads, Bamenda Province (NAB).

²⁰ Interview with Pa Nchouji Cosmas, Njinikom, 4 July 2007, He was one of the passengers that constantly entered the vehicle.

night at Bambui. If the person was coming from Fundong area, he or she would spend the first night at *Mbzigou*, the second night at Kedjom Keku, and then the third at Bambui. With the introduction of the vehicle in their midst it took only a single day to reach Bamenda. Discussions on new ICTs and globalisation suggest that time and distance have been compressed. From the discussion with our informants, their new experiences with the 'new' ICT of vehicle and road in the 1950s showed that time and distance had also been compressed.

That compression of time and distance characterised the delivery of mails too. In 1955 the Postal Agency, was opened in Njinikom, and Benard Komtangi became its first postal clerk. He was born in 1932 at Njinikom. He went to St. Anthony's School, Njinikom, in 1942, and completed in 1948, obtaining his Standard Six Certificate. He then went to Bamenda where he tried his hand in photography but was not successful. He then went to Wum where he met his elder brother, Damian Komtangi. He claims that with motor vehicle transport, mail was delivered faster and the vehicle went to Bamenda twice a week in the dry season and once a week in the rainy season.²¹ He estimated that a total of more than 300 letters were handled in the Njinikom Postal Agency per month but that mail runners lost their jobs. That meant that the vehicle also transported letters from Kom to Bamenda and vice versa.

Motor vehicles and social status

The coming of the motor vehicle also led to the rise of new class of people in Kom that included drivers, motor boys, charterers and mechanics. These new 'professionals' each mastered this new technology and new form of geographical mobility. The first driver, Ishola, drove the vehicle for one year and after that the owner decided to give out the vehicle on hire to a driver, Yerimma, who drove it for one year after which²² Nsah employed the first Kom driver, Marx Nkwain, a prince.

The driver performed the most important function with the vehicle and was greatly admired. He did not talk while driving and when he spoke people listened carefully. Most of the time, he made jokes to help passengers laugh and relax. Wrigley (1986: 77-129), writing about West African drivers, noted that 'The internal combustion engine initiated many people into modern technology, and the lorry driver became the new type of African hero, the adventurer who, like the traders and porters of earlier times travelled dangerously beyond the tribal horizons and even beyond the colonial ones'. Gewalt (2002) was even more specific and noted amongst the Hereros that drivers were considered to be higher in status than other people. The situation in Kom was not very different.

Drivers were also sources of information about the world beyond Kom. Specifically, the driver was the educator for passengers who were not sure of their destinations. Sometimes the driver was a messenger, bearing messages or carrying little packages from friends to friends elsewhere. This situation was not unique to Kom. Jordan (1978: 33) has described how in West Africa, lorry drivers were used to poking fun and playing the roles of messengers. All in all, the material points to the emergence of a new

²¹ Interview with Bernard Komtangi Kuma, Iteiniilah, Njinikom, 26th June 2008. He died on December 26, 2008.

²² Ibid.

class of people who were given birth by the introduction of a new technology, the vehicle.

The charterer and the 'motor boy' were the closest assistants to the driver. The first of Nsah's vehicle was Boniface Ngoh. After his primary school in 1952 he was jobless, when Nsah contacted his uncle, Ambrose Beng whom they had met at Kombone, in Kumba. His uncle immediately accepted that Boniface should become a Nsah's motor boy. According to Boniface, his job was tedious but also prestigious and his friends looked up to him.²³ As a motor boy his job was to sit on the tail board of the vehicle with a piece of wood, a wedge. When the vehicle was climbing a hill with difficulty the driver would shout 'we-dg-e' and then the motor boy immediately went down and put the piece of wood behind the last tyre and the vehicle continued climbing. The motor boy would follow the vehicle on foot until it finished climbing the hill and he could re-enter the vehicle with his wedge. As a motor boy it was also his duty to sleep inside the vehicle at night.²⁴

Then there was the charterer. He was the person who collected the money from the passengers and kept an account of each trip. If they were to spend a night outside Kom as they did most of the time, the charterer paid the driver and motor boy their feeding and accommodation allowances. One of the charterers was Raphael Njouchie. He was born in Njinikom in 1932, and attended St. Anthony's School, Njinikom from 1940 to 1946. Upon completion he was employed as a part time teacher with the Catholic School Mbaw, Kom. He fell out with Catholic authorities because he was dissatisfied with his salary. He left for Kumba in 1950 and James met him in 1953. He used to keep accounts of James's produce. Naturally, when James bought the vehicle in 1955 he became the charterer. Raphael testified that he was a very proud of that job which gave him power over the other two people who operated the vehicle. He had an exercise book which he kept all accounts including fares and charges on luggage and feeding allowances of the motor boy and the driver and himself. He also kept accounts of the cost of vehicle repairs.²⁵ He worked in this vehicle for one year after obtaining his standard six certificate and after that he was called up by the mission and sent to the Teacher's Training College, Kake, Kumba.

The constant servicing of the vehicle was carried out by 'Cammanda' Ngong Tim, who himself had never been to school in the western sense, and more strange, had very little experience with vehicles. Nevertheless he had always wanted to be a mechanic and the opportunity came when his father's friend bought a vehicle. The first time the vehicle abruptly stalled he knew that there was something wrong but did not know exactly what the problem was. Using very crude tools he hit a few knobs. The driver kick-started the vehicle again. When the vehicle owner heard the story he was so happy with him that he bought him two spanners. He was frequently invited to the owner's compound to help with some menial jobs. The relationship between the vehicle owner and him gradually became a father-son relationship. He started a roadside mechanic shop and was always ready to help when there was a problem.²⁶

²³ Interview with Boniface Ngoh, Njinikom 27 June 2008.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Interviewed with Raphael Nchoujie, Futru, Nkwen, 24 January 2009.

²⁶ Ibid.

The fact that he had not formally been to school makes his experience quite interesting. It demonstrates how technology is not always mastered by people who are educated in the western sense. Often it requires creativity and the sense to ‘domesticate’ and adapt it for their needs. Cammanda followed his talent until he became one of the best Mercedes Benz mechanics in Bamenda.²⁷

Roadside mechanics became prominent in the early 1950s as a result of the introduction of the first motor vehicles. Writing about this phenomenon, McLaughlin (1979) and Ikporukpo (2002), described how mechanics carved out an important niche for themselves in both Ghana and West Africa in general. The point is made more forcefully by Verrips & Meyer (2001: 153-184), in their research in Ghana. Using the example of Kwaku’s car they show how Ghanaians understood and dealt with imported cars by restructuring them to suit Ghanaian needs.

The case of the mechanic, the motor boy, and driver also illustrates the implications of kinship for geographical mobility and new technologies. Geographical mobility and the ownership of certain technological objects, for example, could modify and create new forms of kinships and create ‘regimes’ that had not existed before. Those people who worked closely with the lorry and those who only went to the farms to work for the vehicle owner in a sense became his ‘brothers and sisters’ not in the conventional sense of consanguinity as it has been used, but in a biblical idiomatic way of ‘who is more your sister or brother’? Of this type of relation, Carsten (2001: 1) says:

The authors describe what being related does for particular people living in specific localities in Africa, Europe, America, India, China, Madagascar and Alaska. Rather than taking the content of kinship for granted, they build from first principles a photo of the implications and lived experience of relatedness in local contexts. It is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight-socially, materially, affectively. And often, but not always, these connections can be described in genealogical terms, but they can be described in other ways too.

In other words, Carsten argued that the relations of people to the vehicle show that relations could also be invented through other means and for new needs. They are not limited to blood ties but are focused on common interests like the vehicle.

James Nsah, the vehicle owner, became an ‘icon’ on whom people depended for several things. James had acquired a large parcel of farmland from the Fon of Kom and needed labour to farm it. On days when the vehicle did not travel to Bamenda or Mamfe, it transported labour to his farm. The people worked cheerfully and at the end of each day he rewarded them with salt and palm oil. These were basic commodities which were scarce at the time. Those who had no money to pay their fare to Bamenda or Mamfe and who had worked on his farms asked for and were given lifts.²⁸ Evidently, owning a vehicle brought prestige and power as well as other social obligations.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the coming of motor vehicle into Kom in 1955 and the impact of this transport technology on society. It was observed that the person who bought the vehicle had farms in which he cultivated major cash crops like coffee and cocoa. He also employed a number of people who worked for him. Finally, he had to

²⁷ Interview with Cammanda Tim, Old Town, Bamenda, 19 August 2008.

²⁸ Interview with Boniface Ngoh, Njinikom, 29 June 2008.

sell off the farms and his farm house in order to get money which he used to buy the vehicle. In buying the vehicle he depended on Kom people who were living in Lagos at the time. The vehicle came with many consequences into Kom. It affected mobility, it led to dependency and it also showed how technology could be accommodated in a creative way by the society. In perspective the motor vehicle opened Kom to different spaces. The history of transport and communication in Kom must also be seen in the wider context of Cameroon and African history. The increase and accelerating rates of change in transport, especially of the vehicle, geographical mobility and communication that are generally called globalisation began to affect Kom very early, and materialised through the interlocking of a multitude of more or less local hierarchies.

As it has been stated elsewhere, 'For all its symbolic values, the fact remains that the vehicle was able to transport people from one place to another faster and with more endurance than any horse or bicycles could ever hope to muster' (Gewald, 2002). It is obvious but still important to say that the motor vehicle amongst Kom reversed the way people came to see distance, and physical landscape and how they related to each other. Within it, spatial mobility might have increased exponentially and *ipso facto*, proximity among people. Yet at the same time it led to the loss of contact among places and people and vice versa because the new wider road deviated from old nodal points. The vehicle enabled Kom people to reach distant areas much more quickly. By that same token Kom was increasingly becoming a transnational community. The bridging of space and the increase in mobility came about because of the wider road and motor vehicle. The man who bought the vehicle represented another social class than Benedicta, who belonged to a class that was literate and mobile because of schooling. James had no schooling. He was mobile because he had money and became influential in Kom because he bought a vehicle. So the Kom's global encounter led to the coming of *afuem a kfaang* in Kom. As a form of technology the vehicle brought with it a 'regime' in which people could quickly identify themselves as belonging to the lineage of the vehicle owner.

The chapter has also argued that the vehicle created a social structure around it, and concludes finally that Kom expressed their 'Komness' by baptising foreign objects with Kom names which they could understand. The next chapter turns its attention to the church which was not a practical technology like the motor vehicle but which affected Kom geographical and social mobility and identity as well, in several ways.

Church, Christianity and *kfaang* in Kom (*NDO Fiyini ni iwo fiyini kfaang*)

Introduction

The introduction of the colonial church in Africa in the 19th century brought about tremendous changes. The literature on this subject is relatively abundant and describes the changes in hierarchies but it refers very little to geographical and social mobility and even less to the church as a technology. For instance, Ajayi (1982), writing on Eastern Nigeria contends that the Christian church eventually produced new men. The work therefore relates to social change including new social groups and status in society. Markowitz (1973) studied the Congo and reached the same conclusion. Fields (1982) undertook studies in Zambia and concluded that the western church and missionary 'effort to abolish 'paganism' failed. According to him, the intention of Christianity to convert Africans to the new beliefs did not completely transform them. Even if it did, in some quarters, it was temporary because the indigenes later more or less returned to their traditional mores. Fields concludes that Christianity provided Africans with principled grounds for denying customary obligations such as arranged marriages and communal labour. Ndi (1990) studied the Mill Hill Missionaries in Southern Cameroon, and concluded that the church did a lot in the formation of the educated elites who were ready to take up positions in the British colonial administration. What cuts across these works is the fact that authors have only indirectly addressed the issue that the church could be seen as a technology capable of transforming the society through the people who appropriated it, although they did not use the term ICT, that it could ultimately promote social mobility.

This Chapter has the following objectives: Firstly, it argues that the establishment of the church shook the Fon not only by the way his wives deserted him to the mission compound but by the birth of new social hierarchies. How did the church as technology influence the birth of social hierarchies like the catechists, mission boys and mission girls? Did the Fon know that the church which he was supporting was soon gradually to undermine his powers? If so how? What are the changes surrounding technologies that could be expected as well for the introduction of the church as a technology? At the same time does the interaction between the church and society give form to the church itself and to the society? Does this dynamic lead to changing social hierarchies, but not only in form but also in the addition of new actors, and new roles in society? The second argument concerns the church as a structure which influenced both the short and long distance mobility of the Christians. What were the consequences of such mobility

on Kom? How much did the church transform Kom identities and communication and mobility?

In order to search for answers to the above questions the Chapter has been divided into six parts: The first part examines the role of the Fon in the establishment of the church, the second analyses the geographical mobility of Christians as a result of the construction of a bigger church. The third part examines the birth of new men and social hierarchies and the opening of a catechist school in Kom. The fourth section examines the flight of female Christians from Kom palace to the Njinikom mission compound. The fifth section looks more closely at Juliana Ekfwi Chiambong, a woman whose appropriation of Christianity led to the birth of credit unionism in Cameroon. Finally, the issue of how Christianised were the Christians in Kom constitutes the last section.

Reforms and reformers, c. 1926 - c. 1966

The ‘unremitting opponent’ of Christianity, Fon Ngam, died in 1926, leaving unresolved the situation of the Christians at Njinikom, who already numbered 3,000 out of a Kom population of 18,000.¹ The royal throne of Kom Fondom passed to Fon Ndi, who started his reign by legitimizing Christianity, a thing which his predecessor had refused to do. The literature suggests that Fon Ndi was a reformer. Nkwi (1976: 163) claims that Fon Ndi was very conciliatory to the Church and the Christians of Njinikom. Immediately after he became Fon he announced that he would allow the establishment of Christian churches in the three other populated areas of Kom – Njinikom, Fundong and Belo – for a probationary period of six months. Nkwi further says he did so because the British colonial administration appointed Captain Coley to install him. De Vries (1998: 80) also maintains that ‘the leadership of the mission had changed hands from Kom ex-nchinda, to the European priests. For Fon Ndi, this change of leadership meant that conflicts with the church could largely be fought out by the colonial government, which had a clear interest in re-establishing and maintaining traditional authority in Njinikom’. Further archival reports portrayed Fon Ndi as the Fon who was the antithesis of Fon Ngam.²

One example of Fon Ndi as a reformer was reported by M.C. Denton, the acting D.O. for Bamenda. Among other things he claimed: ‘Endima (sic) a brother of the late chief of Bikom has succeeded the deceased, and has been to Bamenda for official recognition by the Divisional Officer. Although not possessed of the dominating personality of his predecessor, he has from the first evinced his desire first not to repeat the errors of the past and secondly to govern the whole of his subjects, Christians and pagans alike (...).’³

¹ File Cb (1937)1 Bamenda Division Annual League of Nations Report (NAB). The colonial files on this census are not reliable. One file in mission 21 archives gave me the total population of 13,454. Another one found in NAB put the total at 1800. The number of Christians in Njinikom and Fuanantui too vary from 2969 to 3000. The only compromise here is that the population was quite much at least. We can only take these statistics with a grain of salt. Fon Ngam had opposed Christianity from its nascent introduction to Kom since 1919 till his death in 1926. He saw with Christianity that his power would be affected if he accepted it in Kom.

² File Cb (1924)3, Annual Report on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province for 1926 by Captain M.C. Denton, Acting Divisional Officer, Bamenda (NAB).

³ Ibid.

This at first appeared like a new dawn compared with the perennial antagonism between Fon Ngam and the Njinikom Christians. Denton's comment also refers to Fon Ndi's official recognition. He also claimed that Fon Ndi from the beginning had shown signs that he was not to repeat the errors of his elder brother, Fon Ngam. The official recognition of Fon Ndi by the British showed that his loyalty was with the British and therefore the Fon had started losing grip over his Fondom.

One of the ways which Fon Ndi attempted to show how sincere he was with his reforms was that he sent an 'ambassador' to Njinikom who was likened to 'his eye' there. He was charged to report back to him. The action boomeranged. According to the Bamenda Division Report of 1928,

The creation of a new post of deputy headman of Njinikom, and the appointment to it of a Christian in order that he might convey the chief's orders to the Christians has definitely proved a failure. The Christians not unnaturally accepted this as an acknowledgement of their existence as a separate political community and proceeded to replace the authority of the elder with a council presided over by the teacher.⁴

Fon Ndi was an example of a Fon who appeared to transform indeed; he was consciously changing his basis of power. With new social hierarchies like the Christian converts set in motion, the gradual erosion of the Fon's power lasted into the 1960s and 1970s. By legitimating the church and the school which was its ancillary there was an unintended creation of new social hierarchies in Kom Fondom. These hierarchies included the catechists, pupils, teachers and workers who saw themselves as subject to the colonial regime, and the majority failed to see any meaning in traditional roles and hierarchies.

Therefore the legitimating of Christianity led to the waning of the Fon's power. The League of Nations Report for 1937 was unequivocal in portraying the decline of traditional authority in Kom and the Bamenda Grasslands.

They (people of the Grasslands) are not prepared to give unquestioning obedience to the commands (sic) of one man, and the autocrat must seek advice and get the weight of public opinion on his side if his orders are to be enforced. Other factors are the spread of Christianity with its demand for a loyalty that may clash with customs of paganism and of education; the detribalisation of those who leave their homes for long periods of time in search of work and knowledge and the gradual abolition of rights and services once accorded by customs to the chiefs but now exacted only with difficulty or else forbidden (...).⁵

Clearly, the Fon's power was challenged not only by Christians. Those who migrated from home and spent a long time in the search for jobs in the plantations and for schooling were a threat to the *status quo*. Hence, apart from Christianity which was already causing a considerable rupture with the traditional authority of Fon Ndi, there was also the geographical and social mobility of Kom people. The coastal plantations and the introduction of colonial taxation led to the spatial mobility of many people, especially from the Bamenda Grasslands, who came to work in the plantations. The D.O.'s report makes clear that many people went and stayed for 'long periods', and 'the plantations were already causing some discontent' in their villages of origin.

In Kom, it appears that the greatest headache which confronted Fon Ndi was provided by Anyway Ndichia Timti who sued the Fon in court, a situation that was unheard

⁴ File Cb (1924) 3 Bamenda Division-Cameroons Province: Report for the year ended 31 December 1927 by E.G. Hawkesworth, Bamenda (NAB).

⁵ File Cb (1937)1 Bamenda Division: Annual League of Nations Report, 1937 (NAB).

of before then. In the beginning of the thesis we met Anyway who was born in 1912, served in the palace and in frustration left for coastal Cameroon. While at the coast he acquired farmlands and cultivated cash crops like cocoa and coffee.⁶ Back in Kom in 1948, he sued the Fon, claiming that he had served the Fon for 18 years without pay. The Fon responded that Anyway had not been compensated because he was stubborn. The chief judge had to rule in the favour of the Fon, fearing that if Anyway won then most of the NA and principles of the Indirect Rule principles would soon lost credibility.⁷

But what is significant here is that the Fon was even taken to court, a court of which quite recently the Fon had been the president. The judges, as well as the defendants, were really shocked and many more called the incident *ghu-i-wo-fyi*, a new happening. Still, important was the fact that Anyway represented the tension which existed between some of the *kfaang* men and the traditional elites. Dike (1956) has shown how the new elites in the Niger Delta of Nigeria who were formerly under the tutelage of slave masters challenged the old hierarchy under which they had been during the slave trade. They did so during period of legitimate trade. The case of Kom as represented by Anyway Ndichia was a similar one.

That notwithstanding, it indicated that the power of the Fon had started waning. The legitimisation of the social hierarchies, especially Christians and colonial structures, was undermining the power of the Fon. Some mobile people had acquired *kfaang* both in doing and thinking and so could not respect traditional mores and authority. To those types of mobile people the old order needed to be overtaken by the new— which they constituted.

Women too began to lose respect for the Fon. Fon Ndi legalised Christianity in Kom with the understanding that royal wives would return to the palace. But this did not happen. Evidence shows that instead of the women returning, women fled the more. Fon Ndi died in 1956 and was succeeded by Fon Lo'oh. The women continued to desert the palace under his reign. It became a source of worry for him. In a letter written to the DO who was on tour in Kom, Fon Lo'oh complained that

Nearly all my wives have deserted me and scattered about everywhere in Kom against Kom Native Law and Custom relating the Fon's wives is that no Fon's wives is allowed to stay anywhere in Kom other than the Fon's compound. Nobody has any right to converse with the Fon's wives except their relatives. But now the Fon's wives go about the town contrary to the custom (...).⁸

In 1958, the Achilles heel of the power of the Fon was assaulted by more than 6,000 women who revolted against a colonial policy which sought to change their farming methods. The Southern Cameroons Agricultural Law of 1955 was largely responsible for that revolt.⁹ In 1956, the Wum Divisional Authority Soil Conservation Rules were

⁶ Interview with Ivo Nkwain, Fuanantui, Kom, 1st August 2008. He was the only surviving brother of Anyway Ndichia Timti.

⁷ For a full proceedings of that judgment see File Md/e (1956)1 Kom Native Court Area Complaints, 1956 (NAB).

⁸ For more on the problems confronting the establishment of Christianity in Kom, there are many files in the National Archives Buea. For instance see File Ba 1927/1 Cameroons Province League of Nations Annual Report for 1927; File Ba 1929/1 Cameroons Province Annual Report, 1928; Sd 1931/1 RC Mission (Njinikom), general Correspondence.

⁹ Laws of the Southern Cameroons 1954, 1955 and 1956 Containing the ordinances and subsidiary legislation of the Southern Cameroons, (NAB).

enacted to re-enforce the 1955 law. These rules contained eight main articles describing farm sizes, method of cultivation and restrictions to farmland. In article two, for example, farms were to be divided by grass strips six feet wide across the slope on the line of the contour of the land into farming areas. This was the one which directly affected Kom. Those who contravened these rules were liable to a fine of up to ten pounds or two months imprisonment or both (Gam Nkwi, 2010: 24-25 and 2003; Diduk, 1989; Konde, 1990; Nkwi, 1985; Ritzenthaler, 1960; Shanklin, 1990 and Westerman, 1992).

This ordinance, as excellent as it sounded, failed to win over the women. Instead in 1958, the Agricultural Department enforced the regulation without sensitizing the women regarding the merits of the new techniques. Fines were imposed on defaulters and corn, beans and potatoes were uprooted by the Agricultural Assistant, Joseph Ndikum, in Anjin. Vertical ridging had characterised the Kom traditional method of farming since the mid 19th century and according to the Kom mind, this symbolised *Abun-a-wain*, the ridge of the child. To radically ask them to change this method without educating them was enough to cause trouble. In July 1958 a meeting was held at the compound of Yindo Mbah, quarter head of Njinikom. The purpose of the meeting was to explain the *raison d'etre* of the 1955 Agricultural Law. He explained that the law was enacted with the knowledge of all the political parties which were KNC and KNDP. What was more was that he insisted that the law would not be repealed whatever the situation.

Summarily the law required that women in hilly areas were to construct ridges horizontally and not vertically as had been the tradition. An agricultural assistant was posted to Kom for that purpose without actually educating the women that the reason for such a law was to check soil erosion in hilly areas like Kom. The matter came to head in June 1958 when at a meeting with the women in the quarter head's compound, KNC stalwarts insisted that women must obey the law because it could not be changed. The women revolted. That revolt caused a severe rupture in the Fondom, stretching into fold of the colonial administration. That movement was known as *anlu*. It lasted for three years from 1958 to 1961. During that period the Fon was constantly called by name. His executive arm, *nkwifoyn* was undermined by the women and many more men who did not sympathise with the women were ostracized. The calling of the Fon by name was considered in Kom as a taboo.

The revolt was started in Njinikom mostly by Christian converts. De Vries (1998) and Ndi (2005) have argued that Christianity influenced the way in which the revolt started. The doctrine of the missionaries about the equality of human race and the liberal ideas which were inculcated among Christians could not be completely separated from the revolt. No doubt the ringleaders of the revolt were early Christian converts like Thecla Neng, Muana, Juliana Chiambong and Fuam. Furthermore, the revolt suggests more crucially that new notions of gender and women's rights had already reached Kom. The mobility and appropriation of education by other women like Benedicta also suggested to the women that they could assert their rights when threatened. The women too were eyewitnesses to the growing 'urbanization' in Kom, and especially in Njinikom, with the opening of the Congo Bar and the phenomenon of women drinking and smoking in public.

The above examples show that the church as technology brought about changes. One of these changes was embedded in the power position of the Fon who legitimated Christianity. But that is not to imply that the Fon was a blind collaborator with the church and Christianity. He had accepted to 'ride the tiger' as much as he knew that his

people needed progress and the church and Christianity were relevant. This situation was similar to what Roberts (1962), experienced in other parts of the African continent as in Uganda, where the Kabaka negotiated his position along similar lines to Fon Ndi with the British colonial administrators and missionaries in Kom.

In considering the church as technology, the gender aspect is striking. Not only was the power base of the Fon undermined, but also the relationship between the sexes. The church opened up the way for a new interpretation of gender relations that diverged considerably from the traditional mores in Kom. Kom women for example assumed positions that had been exclusively the preserve of men. For instance, one of the women who coordinated the women's revolt, Muana, was given a seat in the Kom Native Court. It was the first time that women had gained representation on the court (Gam Nkwi, 2003: 156).

Those who widely threatened the existing power structure of the Fondom were the youths. The local hierarchies created by the colonial administration, as argued by Gupta and Ferguson (1992: 6-23) and Mamdani (1996: 37-62) had little place for Kom youths. The local hierarchies had even contributed to some migrating from home, like Timti. But the youths were anxious to be recognised. The church appeared to be the only place for them. The youths appropriated Christianity and became a social hierarchy in their own right while paying little or no respect to the traditional authority.

Christians on the move

The church as technology determined the geographical and social mobility of those who appropriated it. In 1927 the construction of a larger church led to the internal mobility of many Kom people who as catechumens were asked to transport building materials from Oku, a neighbouring Fondom, to Kom about 50 kilometres from Njinikom. The reward for undertaking this work was baptism and reception into the other sacraments of the church. That project gave birth to a new parish church with a resident priest, Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs. Thus those who were directly involved in the construction of the new church became Christians.

The church building was a temporary one as it proved too small later on. The need for a bigger church was informed by the fact that the number of Christians had increased. Statistics available show that Njinikom and Kumbo Catholic missions had a population of 17,210 Christians, 8,792 of them from Kom by 1934.¹⁰ For a bigger church to be constructed there was also a need for more materials. Such as sun-dried blocks, timber, sand, zinc and cement. All these things had to come from places near the Bamenda Grasslands, some as far away as Nkongsamba and Victoria. One of the catechumens, Peter Yuh, who was born in 1919 and was baptised in Njinikom in 1932 by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs, actively participated in the carrying of the blocks and timber from Mujang, a vassal Fondom of Kom. According to Peter, other building materials like zinc and cement were transported from Nkongsamba, more than 109 miles from Kom. It took nine to ten days for the people to trek to and from Kom¹¹. Materials were also transported from Mamfe and Victoria, 250 and 325 kilometres away

¹⁰ CO 583/159/229, Roman Catholic Missions in the Cameroons, (PRO).

¹¹ File No.474/1921 Ba (1922)2 Report for the League of Nations 1922 for Bamenda Division of the Cameroons Province by W.E. Hunt, District Officer (NAB).

from home, respectively.¹² Those who participated in all this work were selected at random from the morning service on Sundays and were usually very happy to be chosen to perform such 'holy duties'. Those who went to Nkongsamba, Victoria and Mamfe had to travel with their own food and cooks. They took along mats and corn flour and some even took their cooking pots.

According to another eyewitness, Joseph Chongwain NKou Tohbu, who trekked to Nkongsamba,

It was a Sunday when my name was called at the end of the mass service as one of the boys who will trek to Nkongsamba to carry cement. I was happy because I knew that I was doing God's work and we had been taught in the catechumen classes that if somebody died doing God's work he will go to heaven. We left here (Njinikom) the next day about 15 of us and spent the night in Babanki. The next day we spent the night in Pa Kubou's compound in Bamenda. From there we went through French Cameroon spending another night at Babadju. The next day we traveled to Dschang. From Dschang we spent a night in Melong. It was from Melong that I cannot quite remember whether we spent a night before reaching Nkongsamba. At Nkongsamba we shared a tin of cement because in those days cement came in tins. It took us another nine days to come back to Njinikom. It was never an easy journey but all of us did it happily. The journey was kept lively through singing.¹³



Photo 6.1 The Njinikom church building that was demolished in 1936. After that there began the erection of the more solid church whose materials came from Juayang, Nkongsamba and Victoria. The photograph was taken by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs, the first resident priest of Njinikom parish.

Source: Parish Archives, Njinikom

¹² File Ba 1924/ Report for the League of Nations 1924 for Bamenda Division of the Cameroons Province by W.E. Hunt, District Officer (NAB).

¹³ Interview with Joseph Chongwain Nkuo Tobu, 98 years, Wombong, Kom, 20 September 2008. He died on 26 December 2008.

Technology in the sense of the church includes modern construction. In Kom it led to mobility of goods and people. The appropriation of the church and Christianity coupled with geographical mobility introduced the Christians to a new world view. This showed the changing nature introduced by technology to Kom. The Church therefore was one of the agents which brought about internal and long-distance geographical mobility.

The one result of the trek to Nkongsamba, Victoria and other places to transport building materials was a church compound which was constructed with zinc (*a-kass-a-kfaang*), 'zinc of newness'. The building was a sign of the establishment of the church and a measure of progress. Its effect was not only to make people more mobile, but also caused them to change their ideas about the future. In that newness (*kfaang*) which technology entailed could be found in the thinking and doing of the minds of Kom people, comparable to the effect of the vehicles and the roads. The Christians also became 'local heroes and heroines'; people who trekked great distances and transported the material that was used for the construction of 'God's House'. These people helped in propagating the word of God to those who were not yet converted.

Another side-effect of the construction of the church and the church compound, which included the school, catechumenate, priest's residence, a cemetery and a catechist's residence, was some people had to make way for the new site, displacing them from the land on which they depended for farming for subsistence. It is not clear how many people were displaced, but it is certain that some people lost their land. In an area which was already suffering from the scarcity of land because of its topography, a piece of land of about ten acres was a lot. The story of how the early missionaries acquired the land has remained a subject for debate among researchers who have worked on missionary activities in Kom. Authority over land in most parts of Africa in general and the Bamenda Grasslands too remained the exclusive right of chiefs or the Fon. Chilver and Kaberry (1967: 38) maintain that: 'Throughout most of the Bamenda Grassfields eminent domain in land is vested in the chief or village head as trustee of the community and the settlement of strangers requires his permission. *De facto* control over land is exercised by lineage or extended family heads and in some cases extends to trees planted by male dependents (...).' And such local Photos ultimately derived their authority from the Fon, to whom the land in essence 'belonged'.

The Bamenda Annual Report by Cantle and Hooks maintained in 1932 that 'a lease for a plot of five acres in addition to that already leased, had been allotted to Njinikom mission'.¹⁴ The report did not mention the consequences of leasing such big tracts of land to the mission neither does the report inform us about any agreement that was signed between the colonial administration and the missionaries.

Before the church and Christianity arrived, Kom people went out for farm work, hunting, and tapping palm wine in the morning. The church altered the way people looked at their daily activities and so brought about a different world view. Christianity and the church had its code which included the commandments and laws of the church. Defaulting on one of these laws meant that the Christian had to go for confession. For instance, just like the colonial system of taxation Christians had to pay church collection; attend daily and especially Sunday mass, and participate in the upkeep of the

¹⁴ File Cb 1932/2 Bamenda Division Annual Reports 1932-1933 by L.L. Cantle and R.J. Hook (NAB).

church compound. By engaging in all these things the normal activity of the Kom people changed. Hence, *kfaang* entailed ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ too.

Those who appropriated the church and Christianity changed by taking up new names. They became called Peter, John, Joseph, Janarius, Edwards, Emmanuel, Benard, Mary, Emmanuella, Josepha, Susanna and Beatrice, to name only a few. Through those names, they changed mentally and their even physical appearance altered through their dress. Thus it appeared that they were now ‘different’ people but their change was only inscribed on the technology which they had appropriated. Many of their traditional ways of doing things still remained. What is important was the taking up of new names by those who had appropriated the technology. New names (*ayiina kfaang*) were introduced for them as new codes which distinguished them from the other people who were derogatorily called pagans. Yet those names were prefixes to traditional names.

The direct implication was that although these new names were given, the traditional names did not disappear. Thus, with a new name there were one or two other names – for example, ‘BENEDICTA NENG YOUNG’. Clearly, for a Christianity of newness as it came to be known in Kom to make any sense, there had to be a blend of what already existed, as with names. The church came to realize that Africa of which Kom was part did not fully embrace Christianity. Thus, through Pope John Paul II, appeared the seminal document *Ecclesia in Africa*. The church in Africa came to combine western religion with indigenous ways of worshipping (Mbi, 2005). Transformation in that case remained inscribed on the surface. A case to illustrate the half-way transformation of *kfaang* people was captured by a Cameroonian novelist, Kenjo Jumbam. Jumbam (1980) treats the early days of Christianity in Nkar, a village in Nso. In the novel the parish priest attacks a show of masks only to discover that it was his head catechist, Michael, behind the mask. That example emphasised how difficult it at times to sacrifice all of what already existed on the altar of *kfaang*. Rev. Fr. Neilien who worked in the Bamenda Grasslands since the mid-1940s observed that, ‘A hundred years of Christianity has not succeeded in making Christianity an African religion. People take to it, because they feel it to be a good influence coming from abroad. It gives them a certain standing, a sense of belonging, like speaking English or French, but leaves their deepest feelings unsatisfied (...)’ (Neilen, 1964: 104).

Photos 6.2 and 6.3 show the mission compound including the Priest’s house in 1952. Those who appropriated these artefacts of the church came out changed mentally, and in turn their ways of thinking and doing things. It is obvious to say that they gained new status. Remarkably, the church only became a technology because people appropriated it. Thus, a technology has meaning only when it is used in relation to something. The church house would not have had any meaning if people could not enter it, if people could not accept it, translate and appropriated it in their social context. It should be relevant to the people and their society. Thus by appropriating it, they changed their mentalities. The church house and its surrounding buildings also changed the landscape of the environment.

Photos 6.4 to 6.8 illustrate the role of Christianity in the geographical and social mobility of Christians at a time when there were no lorries operating in the area. Photos 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6 confirm the relationship between technology, mobility and portage. The Christians by metaphorically acting as lorries became technologies because they played the role of vehicles. Photos 6.7 and 6.8 show carriers returning from Victoria, transporting the luggage of the Mill Hill Missionaries to Njinikom. Scenes of geographical mobility like these were very frequent at a time when the human back was the

'Lorry'. The photographs from the Parish archives at Njinikom were taken by Rev. Fr. Leo Onderwater, one of the priests in Njinikom from the Netherlands in the early 1930s.



Photo 6.2 The church and the priest's residence

Source: Njinikom Parish Archive



Photo 6.3 The church compound, which included the school, cemetery and the catechumenate

Source: Njinikom Parish Archives



Photo 6.4 Carriers resting near River Nyong in the vicinity of Edea on their way to the Bamenda Grasslands. Lutz, Love (American Presbyterian Missionaries), Martens. Photographed by Rheinhold Theodor Rohde on 31 December 1912.

Source: Mission21 Archives at *Missionstrasse*, Basel, Switzerland, (BMCA-e-30. 11.28).



Photo 6.5 The Christians and missionaries returning from Bali, 1907. BMCA E-30.25.013: Gotlieb Freiderich Spellenberg

Source: Basel Mission21 Archive; ref.QS-30.001. 1174.01



Photo 6.6 Transportation of a missionary's child in his baby cot
Source: Mission21 archives BMCA-E-30.87.056.



Photo 6.7 Christians carrying the goods of the priests to Njinikom from Victoria
Source: Njinikom Parish Archives

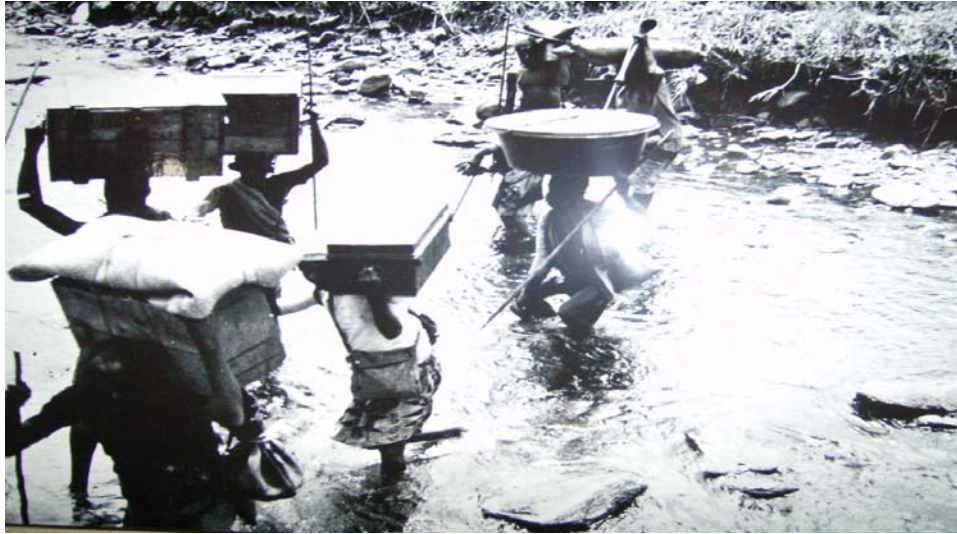


Photo 6.8 Christians carrying the goods of their priests going on outstations
Source: Njinikom Parish Archives

The birth of ‘new men’

What emerged from the church and Christianity in relation to a new social order was the birth of houseboys and mission boys. These boys served as gardeners, washer men, messengers, interpreters, guides and catechists. They wore European clothes and could speak some pidgin English. By the very nature of things it made them believe that they were a class apart. As a people apart the mission boys started to think and act differently from other boys whom they thought had not reached the level of *kfaang*. The D.O. for Bamenda, N.C. Duncan, confirmed such thinking when he remarked that ‘the mission boys are now irritating their less enlightened brothers by taking up the ancient mascots placed on their farms which served as boundary marks and insure successful crops’.¹⁵ In other words the mission boys did not longer see themselves subjected to traditional way of life since they felt that they had imbibed *kfaang*.

Mission boys were the centre of attraction, and appeared opposed to the heathen ways (Simoyan, 1988: 143). They were the by-products of missionary churches and Christianity, and saw themselves as people apart who had imbibed the teachings of their mentors ‘willy-nilly’, although rejecting certain aspects which were irrelevant to their new ways of life as Christian Africans. In Kom, mission boys (*woin falla*, pl. *wain falla*, sing.) like Joseph Muhbi Nsang, were entrusted with the daily activity of going to Fujua, a Fulani hamlet where cattle was grazed, every morning to fetch fresh milk for the Rev. Father’s tea. He had to do this for the whole year. Godfrey Fuka was charged with cleaning the father’s house, washing and ironing the father’s clothes and cooking. Andrew Ngongbi Fukuin was charged with transporting mail from Njinikom to Bamenda at a time when there was no Post Office. He went to Bamenda once every fortnight to

¹⁵ File Ba (1922) 1 Report on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons, 30th September 1921 by N.C. Duncan, District Officer, Bamenda (NAB).

get the mail. These letters were read out in the church. These boys were apart from their peers because they were closer to the white priests. What enhanced their apartness was that these priests clothed them at a time when having a pair of short trousers or a shirt fascinated onlookers. ‘Once a boy or girl professed Christianity he invariably discarded his photosque tribal costumes and assumed the Western Christian’s shirt and trousers’ (Ndi, 2005: 80 and Booth, 1971: 175). Once these boys put on the new costumes they felt and thought that they were better than the missionaries. Christopher Fuka, born in 1923 in Njinikom, was one of the mission boys and he said:

My first trouser which was khaki was given to me by Rev. Fr. Thomas Burke Kennedy with a sweater. When I put it on I felt as though I was on top of the world. I felt as if my feet were not touching the ground. I discovered that many girls were making signs towards me. They were always giving me pears and ripe bananas and through that I got my first, wife, Susannah Bih whom we are still married today. We had five children. In those days working in the mission compound was a very important job even if you were just cutting the grass.¹⁶

The Cameroonian novelist, Mungo Beti, writing about early missions in South Cameroons, describes one of the mission boys, Zacharia, almost in the same vein as Fuka: ‘He dresses sharply and walks in a haughty manner that suit his tallness. And then he feeds his pride on the swarm of girls who run after him’ (Beti, 1971: 14). The situation of mission boys in Kom therefore was not unique to Kom.



Photo 6.9 Rev. Fr. Leo Onderwater with his mission boy
Source: Njinikom Parish Archives

The parallel of mission boys were mission girls. Mission girls were ‘quarantined’ in the mission compound to be groomed towards getting marriage without breaking their virginity. They were also taught cleanliness and new ways of doing things like sewing,

¹⁶ Interview with Christopher Fuka, Njinikom, 12 August 2009. He died on 25 November 2010.

washing kitchen utensils and also the vocations of joining Rev. Sisters in the convent. Dorothy Nteinmusi and Camilla Ngohchia were mission girls and they maintained that:

In those days it was a very bad thing for a young girl not to belong to the mission. When one of their members got married the others brought gifts and it was expected that the married member should weep when the other members were going away. If she did not weep it meant that she already had a sex affair with the husband. Initially, these girls stayed at the mission compound but when the convent was opened in 1953 they were now stayed in the convent as convent girls and went back to their homes on weekends to visit their parents.¹⁷

Mungo Beti, again, maintains that in ‘every mission in South Cameroons there is a building which houses in principle, all young girls engaged to be married. This is the Sixa. All our girls who want to married in the strict Catholic way are required to stay here for about four months before getting married’ (Beti, 1971: 5). These girls underwent mental transformation once they had professed the faith. Surprisingly, they were supervised by a man.



Photo 6.10 The photo of mission girls with their master
Source: Njinikom Parish Archives

The catechist school and ‘important new men’

Catechists were the more important ‘new men’ in the church. In 1935, St. Peter Claver’s catechist school, to train catechists, was opened in Njinikom. The first rector of that school was Rev. Fr. Schmid. That school was later transferred to Shisong, in Nso and in 1939 Fabian Ateh from Kom graduated from the school and became the first trained catechist in Kom. The catechists became very important personalities as they deputised for the priests when they were absent. The catechists were also important as they be-

¹⁷ Interview with Dorothy Nteinmusi, Njinikom, 20 January 2009; Camilla Ngohchia, Foncha Street, Bamenda, 2nd February 2009.

came mobile geographically and socially, moving to outstations and were the nearest people to the white missionaries. Their importance was also seen in the fact that they understood the white man's language, a new technology and could translate into Kom, an advantage which the missionaries lacked. The preponderant role played by the catechists was summarised by His Lordship, Bishop Francois Xavier Vogt in 1922. Speaking as the Apostolic Vicar in Cameroon he said: *inter alia*: 'They can manage the most impossible situations and bring light where the missionary might risk losing his Latin and his patience' (Sundkler & Steed, 2000: 755). De Vries (1998: 109) further captured the *modus operandi* of the catechist in the following words: 'their task included teaching at mission schools, teaching catechism in doctrine classes and so forth. In the absence of a resident missionary, the catechist virtually ran the mission on his own. The catechist often became a notable in his home village, as the village's interpreter of the European world.' More recently, Elias Ngum gave an eye witness account of the place of the catechist in early Christianity to Guy Thomas. Amongst other things he said:

The catechists at the time (in the 1930s and 1940s) were very bold. They could stand for Christ. I remember the example of a catechist who stood for Christ in the Mbenka village which is part of our village (Wum). He stood seriously, even for the community when they rose up against him, to the extent that he was chasing the chief of the village. He stood firm for the Gospel and was able to fight the confrontation to show to the people that the church he was planting was the true church and the God he had brought was more powerful than the local gods (Thomas, 2005: 537).¹⁸

It meant that catechists were in themselves playing the roles of the new men. These new men who appropriated the church clashed with village authorities. In the Cameroon Province there have been frequent reports on how catechists chastised the village authorities.¹⁹ Some denied the traditional subjection to village heads and chiefs outright as the case of Timneng showed.

One of the catechists of the early 1970s was Marcus Chiatii. He has been the head catechist of Njinikom since 1973. Born at Wombong-Njinikom in 1943, he attended Saint Peter and Paul Catholic School, Fuanatui, from 1955 to 1958 and moved to St. Anthony's School, Njinikom, because there was no Standard Four class at Fuanatui. He completed studies from St Anthony's School in 1963 and in 1964 he started as an untrained catechist at Abu, a village in Kom and from there he served as a pupil teacher at Mbaw, another village in Kom while at the same time he doubled as a catechist. In 1966 he went to Nguti, Southwest Cameroon, as a student catechist. He graduated on March 30th, 1969 with a diploma in catechetics known as *missio canonica*.

Upon return to Njinikom, he worked with Rev. Fr. Francis Woodman who posted him to Fuanatui as both catechist and primary school teacher. In 1973 he was transferred to Njinikom by Rev. Fr. John Haak. It is worth noting that Marcus was the son of a catechist, George Ngwi. On 5 May 1971 he married Grace Muso and they have eleven children. Chiatii claims that when he started the work of the catechists he was strongly advised by the priests to make sure that he would never translate to the Christians anything that would scare them away from the church. The rule was that he should

¹⁸ Interview with Elias Ngum Gbai Cheng, Bamenda, 19 April 1999 by Guy Thomas.

¹⁹ For more on catechists versus traditional political control in the Cameroon Province, see File No. Ce/1929/1 Mamfe Division Annual Report 1929; File Da/1928/1, Bamenda Division, Quarterly Report, ending March 1928 (NAB).

always interpret what would lead to more conversions. During his tenure of office he had witness the baptism of some 13,500 Christians, taught more than 10,000 communicants and 9,200 confirmed Christians.²⁰

The above figures suggest the important role of the catechists in the mental transformation. As at 1998, more than thirty catechists have worked at Njinikom parish since its foundation. They included Michael Timneng Andreas Ngongbi; Paul Njuakom; Mukong Chine; John Nshing; David Mbam; Francis Chianyanga; Fabian Ateh; Gabriel Bassebang; Simon Ateh; Michael Njam; Joseph Kaisha; Patrick Ndichia; Mathias Timngum; Peter Bung; Richard Ngeh; Martin Ateh; Aloysius Adrbain; Thadeus Beng; Theresia Sih; Gregory Boh; John Ndinyah; Thaddeus Njua; Thomas Anguo; Philip Nyamkwe; Ignatius Tosam; Godfrey Loh; John Tobou; Chrispinus Ndifoia; Chrysanthus Ngeh; Magdalene Bih Nsang; Simon Ngong; Isaac Agha, ah; Richard Wam; Nelson Kini and Simon Tuh.²¹ These catechists taught as many as 2,000 Christians during their tenure. Therefore they were important agents in the transformation of Kom. From the beginning the catechists were seen as the first interpreters; they were mediators between the missionary and the Christian Kom folks as well as managers of the mission outstations.

Mission outstations were part of the church's influence regarding mobility, technology and the 'anchoring' of *kfaang* in Kom. These were stations without resident priests and with only few Christians. These outstations became important nodal points for evangelisation. They became 'missions within missions' and need further attention. Outstations were part of the formula for the decentralisation of the Catholic Mission enterprise. Outstations were set apart from the main institutions of the church, just as the mission field comprised a separate domain from the vicariate in Southern Cameroons and Rome. The linkages between each mission station and main parish in Kom were based on centre-periphery model. This was even reproduced at the third level, based on the necessity for evangelization (For the Centre-periphery see, Miller, 1994; and Thomas, 2001). At any mission decentralised there were catechists who were needed to manage the outstations. This required their constant geographical mobility between the forty-four main outstations under Njinikom Parish, as well as one visit per quarter by a priest. With such decentralisation *kfaang* was able to radiate from the centre which was the main parish, to the peripheral outstations with the catechists playing the key role.

Those who were charged to carry the priest on his travelling assumed a certain importance. They carried the priests on their shoulders in either difficult topographies or where streams were swift. Below is a typical scene which shows a carrier, carrying a Rev. Father on his way to an outstation.

The contact between the main mission and outstation was maintained through quarterly visits from the mission priests who would trek to the outstations. When the missionaries went on tour they were accompanied by many people carrying their loads, including the missionary's bed and beddings, cooking utensils, mass box, food, Bible, mass wine, chalice, missionary's sandals and a stretcher to carry the missionary when he was exhausted. Sometimes the missionary was carried on the shoulder of devoted Christians when the topography became very difficult. At one time as many as forty

²⁰ Interview with Marcus Chiatii, Njinikom, 14 September 2008. It might be interesting to note that Marcus was the son of a catechist.

²¹ Compiled from the Parish Archives, Njinikom Mission, 7-10 September 2008.



Photo 6.11 Carrier, carrying a Rev. Fr. on his way to an outstation
 Source: Cosmas Nchouji's Album

carriers were required at a time to transport the missionary's luggage and the tours sometimes lasted as long as three months. This was because Njinikom, which was the centre of Christianity in Kom, before 1935 supervised outstations such as Mamfe, some 350 kilometres away. On return the carriers transported most of the gifts given to the priests as offertory by the Christians. Fidelis Nkwain was one of the porters. He was born in Njinikom in 1946. He attended St. Anthony's Primary School and obtained the Standard Six Certificate. He claimed that gifts to the church included beans, plantains, fowls, eggs, goats, sugar cane, groundnuts, mangoes and bananas.²²

Photo 6.12 shows some of the premier student-catechists learning how to read in St Claver's Catechists school. The reading reflects the social mobility which the church and Christianity introduced in Kom. Those standing behind the reading class are either admiring the magic of reading or being spiteful of it. In most case it was admired. Those reading also display different postures.

The role played by the catechists, mission boys, Christians and carriers fitted into the framework of human agency in the propagation of Christianity. These people them-

²² Interview with Fidelis Nkwain, Njinikom, 7 August 2008.



Photo 6.12 The reading 'drama' and the audience watching from behind and admiring the *kfaang* men

Source: The Parish archives, Njinikom, retrieved by the author. It had been photographed by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs

selves changed and assumed a multiple identity. They went about convincing their kith and kin to be converted to Christianity. The conversion was just part of their identity that was changed. Most of the Christians sooner or later returned to their traditional ways of life. These traditional way of life included pouring libations to ancestors and marrying more than one wife. All these things had been condemned by the missionary doctrines. Tishken (2002: 160) remarks that in Madagascar, Malagasy, Christians were equally prominent in converting their countrymen. In Buganda, Dallington Scopin Maftaa aided the missionary Stanley in preparing a Swahili translation of the Bible, written in Arabic script. 'Were it not for their actions, Christianity would likely have remained a religion for the few (...) white missionaries often lacked the language skills, cultural literacy, and legitimacy necessary to convince individuals to forsake their own religion and adopt another, that was most often the synthesis of Christianity and an indigenous religion'. They were active in the conversion of their kinsmen but they themselves never accepted the new religion in all its forms and precepts, while maintaining elements of the older beliefs.

One of the fundamental changes which came as a result of the influence of the church concerned royal women. It could be argued that the church as technology, in the sense used in this work, connected the royal women to Njinikom and disconnected them from the palace. The implantation of the church as technology in Njinikom led to royal women to disconnect and escape the strict regimes of chiefly authority at Laikom and liberate themselves from the yoke of patriarchal obligations.

Female Christians in the limelight seek happiness

Christianity did not only bring about the mobility of men. Women also shared in this mobility, and Njinikom became the centre to which women, especially royal women, came to be converted. It was as if the mission compound was 'filled' by royal women. The moving of royal women to the mission compound brought some disruption between the Fon and the missionaries. The Fon could not sit and look on as his wives flocked to the church to listen to those he branded 'infidel missionaries'. The first reason which explains such movement was the appeal of aspects of Christian doctrine to women, and the material culture such as new clothing which accompanied the encounter with the church.²³ During the fieldwork, many women acknowledged the fact that their first clothes were either given by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs or Leo Onderwater, all being the first priests in Njinikom. One of the women for whom conversion and dress had a direct bearing was Helena Adiansa. She was born in 1920, at Wombong, and could vividly remember her first dress. It was given to her by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs very early in the morning after mass. The priest called her into the house and wrapped the clothes in a black paper and told her that if she was asked who gave her the clothes she should tell the person that they came from the church.²⁴ These clothes were usually distributed in secret, and only when the women had become catechumens or fully baptised Christians, or when they came for morning or daily mass. It would appear that the giving of clothes was a strategy to convert people to Christianity.

However, the doctrine of Christianity liberated women from a 'bondage' in a way could be said to be living in bondage. Some of Christian doctrine ran counter to pre-colonial practices. The church's propagation of 'one man-one wife', or monogamy, acted as an incentive for women to escape from marital structures they found constricting. Secondly, the young 'mobile guys' after working in Fernando Po returned and stood against all traditional mores attached to the role of these women. The flight of royal women was not peculiar to Kom. Ndi (2005: 54-56) has noted that in Nso, another Fandom of the Bamenda Grasslands with almost the same experience of Christianity, most of the royal women escaped to the mission.

Apart from the two reasons mentioned above it has also been shown elsewhere that many royal women, especially in Kom, were sexually unsatisfied, since Kom mores saw these women more in economic than emotional terms. The women ploughed the Fon's farms and cooked for palace guests. The situation later on changed as these women protested by moving out. Writing about the returnees from Fernando Po, the D.O. for Bamenda, Hunt, claimed that the return of the Catholic Mission to Kom with its emotional appeal attracted many young women to the churches, and unfortunately wives of the chiefs were among them. Writing about the flight of royal women he claimed that,

In particular this has been the case with the chief of Bikom, a man between 60 and 70 with over a hundred wives of whom some are 20. Some of these, mostly young, have left him to attend the mission church and refused to return to him unless he gives them facilities for conversion, of which he will not hear. The result is a bitter estrangement between him and the Christian congregation, of whom some have harboured and more than harboured the runaways, so that he has practically cut off

²³ Interview with Helen Adiansa, Wombong, Kom 30 September 2008.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

communication with the Njinikom quarter where the church is. Seduction of the wives of their people has also helped to set the chiefs of Bansa and Kom against the mission (...).²⁵

The Fon as indicated by the colonial report was usually old and frail. Most of his wives in the palace were young. The Fon could hardly be expected to satisfy the sexual needs of so many young women. In this respect the appeal of Christianity for such women was obvious. According to the women, the returned migrants not only represent Christianity but something deeper in their eyes. That was a different type of the romantic aspect which the women never had in the palace. The Fernando Po returnees and Christianity were accompanied by 'romantic love' that was new and attractive to the women. They therefore brought along 'love of newness' (*iikong-i-kfaang*). Cole and Thomas (2009: 4-10), writing about love in Africa between the wars maintain that: 'we cannot understand sex or intimacy without understanding ideologies of emotional attachment (...) and that claims to love were also claims to modernity'. That appeared to be involved in what was going on between the Fon's wives and the new men at Njinikom.

The escape of royal wives to Njinikom at this time has attracted the attention of scholars who have studied the influence of the church and Christianity in Kom. In the most recent work, Ndi (2005) examined the Mill Hill Missionary activities in Southern West Cameroon between 1922 and 1972. In the light of the impact of Christianity in the area, he generally lumped together the fleeing royal wives in Kom and Nso. De Vries (1998) in an attempt to establish the indigenous response to the introduction of Christianity in Kom also revisited the escape of the royal wives to Njinikom. Nkwi (1976) touched on the runaway wives and claims that the Fon never had a problem with Christianity, but rather with those early Christians who caused his wives to flee from him. An assumption that is open to debate.

It was considered unacceptable in Kom tradition for a royal wife to escape or be seduced by an 'infidel', even if in the name of a Christian (Nkwi, 1976: 160-161). G.V. Evans, the D.O. for Bamenda Province, put it more deftly in the following words: Adultery with a chief's wife was considered a heinous crime. If the two were caught *in flagrante delicto* they would both be executed by the *nkwifoyn* in public. If there was some doubt about it, the ordeal of trial by sasswood would be resorted to (...).²⁶ These incidents however need to be understood in the context of new forms of geographical and social mobility. The women had to disconnect from the palace to get connected to the church because they saw the advantages of *kfaang*. Those who became pregnant under such circumstances remain another area of research which needs further attention.²⁷

Other women on the move

Apart from women fleeing to the church compound, some also went to Nso to be baptised. That geographical mobility of women from Kom to Nso, before a resident

²⁵ See File No.Cb/1929/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division for 1929 (NAB).

²⁶ File Ad 2/59/26, Bikom Assessment Report by G.V. Evans, District Officer Cameroon Province (NAB).

²⁷ Christianity and sex is something that has been generally ignored in research in Africa. It will appear that much was linked to pregnancy and early years of Christianity. But it has not yet interested researchers (...) Why, where and how all these happened needs to be addressed by researchers.

priest in the name of Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs came to Njinikom, needs further attention here. It would appear that in the history of Christianity women have always been the first to be converted. Before the advent of Christianity it was generally assumed (by men at least) that women were and should be subordinate to men. Christianity came along with an appealing doctrine. McNall Burns et al. (1984: 222) claim that, 'Compared to most other religions, Christianity was favourable to women. Female souls were regarded as equal to male ones in the eyes of God, and human nature was deemed to be complete only in both sexes'. Kom women were no exception.

Most of them saw the appropriation of Christianity as a means to reverse the polygamous practices of Kom and liberate themselves. According to Thecla Neng Nakeh, born c. 1901 and baptized in Nso, it usually took at least three to four days to reach Nso. According to her,²⁸ the women left Njinikom and spent the night at Belo. The next day they trekked to Bamessi. The third day trekked through Ndop plain and reached Babessi, the airport end of Ndop plain. At Babessi, they were tested. Those who were successful in the catechumen proceeded to Nso for baptism. If they were already converted and baptised, they were confirmed. The journey to Nso was usually spiced by songs which were mostly religious and the group was led by the catechist.

Juliana Ekfwi Chiambong and the Credit Union in Kom

One person whose mobile itinerary was to have a great impact on herself, on Kom and on Cameroon more widely was Juliana Ekfwi Chiambong. Her story seems to illustrate that of a woman 'completely changed' by the church in her thinking and identity. She was born at Wombong, Kom around 1908 and was among the first Christians to be baptised in Nso. She was baptised on 12 August 1926 and the following day she received her first holy communion given by Fr. Leonard Jacobs as number 1,712 in the annual returns. She received confirmation on 4 April 1927 and married William Ngong on 21 March 1934. She lives at Atuilah, Njinikom.

She was therefore amongst the first Christians from Njinikom who were baptised in Nso. Her other colleagues included Thecla Neng, Clara Nyanga and Adiensa Helen. During separate discussions with these people they shared the same experience of going to Nso but Juliana's case was more relevant for two reasons: First, she was connected, directly or indirectly to the upgrading of the Njinikom parish to a full parish because of an incident which occurred with her friend's child. Secondly, she was the woman who was linked to the opening of the Credit Union in Njinikom. The case of Juliana is very striking when we take a close look at the effect of mobility and appropriation of technology in her case. The Credit Union which is found today in most parts of Cameroon had its roots in Njinikom and Juliana is credited with its inception.²⁹

²⁸ Interview with Thecla Neng, Isailah, Njinikom, 25 June 2008. She was born in around 1901. Her contemporary was Helen Adiensa. She was interviewed at Wombong, 22 September 2008.

²⁹ Juliana Ekfwi Chiambong, interviewed at Njinikom, 30 June and 30 September 2008. During the discussion which lasted for several hours she displayed a firm knowledge of the introduction of Christianity in Kom and how they used to trek to Nso. While in Nso they went through some tough times ranging from where to spend the night to what to eat as well as the fear of whether they were going to pass the exams before receiving baptism. On the days of the interview at her residence she was almost completely sedentary.

Her story which is connected with the birth of Credit Union is linked to her being one of the first women to trade in beer in Njinikom. According to her, as far back as 1962, when her husband died she needed to send her children to school. The only business she could find at the time was to sell beer illegally from her house. It was 'illegal' because the colonial Liquor Ordinance made it clear that beer should not be sold in the house.³⁰ In the course of selling the beer she came to be known by Rev. Fr. Anthony Jantsen, through the last daughter of Juliana, Zita Nain. He was interested in drinking beer and so came to know Juliana better. The Rev. Father understood her predicament in terms of paying her children's school fees. In 1963 Father Jantsen was transferred to open a new secondary boarding school for girls at Ashing, Kom (St. Bede's College).³¹ He told Juliana that a place would be opened in Njinikom which would enable her to save money and help her and other people to pay the fees of their children. In the evening of September (*njong njonsii*) Fr. Jansen came round and assembled 10 Christians at the house of Juliana at Atuilah, Njinikom and told them that he wanted to open a Credit Union so that they could save their money and pay for their children in school (Booth 1971: 255).³² That led to the opening of the first Credit Union in Cameroon, and Juliana Chiambong was the first member who put a 50 FRS coin in her savings account.³³

Today the history and the genealogy of credit unionism as an outpost of the church can be traced back to Njinikom in 1963. Delancey (1977: 318) wrote that

The first credit unions were established in 1963 in the Bamenda area of Northwest Cameroon by two Roman Catholic priests who had previous training and experience in this kind of work in Canada and the United States; four years later there were 13 registered credit unions and over 20 discussion groups or proto-unions, mainly in the neighbourhood of Njinikom and Nsaw (...) In September 1968 the primary societies joined together to form the West Cameroon Credit Union League which became a member of the African Cooperative Savings and Credit Associations.

It is therefore within reason to contend that the geographical mobility of Juliana to Nso for her baptism led to her selling beer, which in turn attracted Father Jantsen who then, because of their acquaintanceship, started the Credit Union.

During the rugby celebration of the existence of the Credit Union by the Credit Union league in Cameroon Juliana was given a certificate of recognition for the role she played not only in the opening of the first Credit Union but also as the first person to drop a 50FRS CFA coin in that credit union. Below is a certificate of the recognition that was given to Juliana in 2003.

³⁰ File No. Ba (1923)/1032/1923, Report for the League of Nations for the year 1923; File No. Ba 1925/1 Report on the Administrative organisation and Progress of the British Cameroons for the year 1925; File No. Ba (1927)1, Cameroons Province League of Nations Annual Report for 1927 and Report by His Majesty Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under British Mandate for the year 1937.

³¹ Interview with Zita Nain, 20 September 2008, Njinikom.

³² Ibid. This information was also found in Booth, *The Mill Hill fathers in West Cameroon: Education*, p. 255.

³³ Interview with Jacob Ngwei, Njinikom, 14 June 2008; Martina Sangtum, Njinikom 10 June 2008 and interviewed with Michael Njousang, Njinikom 23 June 2008. All these people as well as other people who I have not cited because of space confirmed that before the establishment of the credit union in Njinikom there were no credit unions in Cameroon.



Photo 6.13 Juliana Chiambong's certificate of recognition as one of the first members of the credit union
Source: Juliana Chiambong's collection



Photo 6.14 Old credit union building, Atuilah, Njinikom
Source: Photo by author



Photo 6.15 Juliana Ekfwi Chiambong
Source: Photo by author

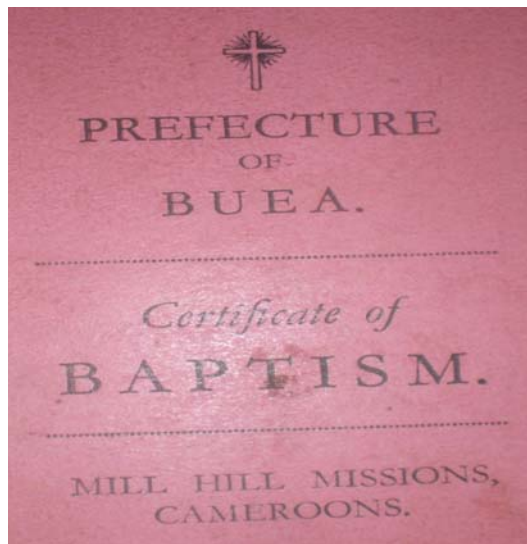


Photo 6.16 The certificate of Baptism of Chiambong
Source: Chiambong's collection

Apart from the role which Juliana played in the introduction of Credit Union in Kom she also claims that during her trek to Nso, something happened to them which she recounts in the following words:

One day we left for Nso and my friend had a small child who she carried on the back. It was very cold and you know that by then there were no clothes. We used something like clothes but it was just a piece of something to hide one's nakedness. We moved all along with that child and by the time we reached Nso it was sad to discover that the child had long died. So we were travelling with a dead child. That was the year which I went to take baptism (1926). It was a very serious thing and Fr. Jacobs wrote to Bishop Peter Rogan. When we came the next year for confirmation we only carried the things of Fr. Leonard Jacobs and from thence Njinikom had a resident priest.³⁴

The story of Juliana points to some basic issues that cannot be glossed over. It would be probable to conclude that the resident priest that came to Njinikom was aware of the hardship which the catechumens faced on their way to Nso and the death of the son of Juliana's friend was just another factor. It could also have been that the Njinikom outstation was already planned to be upgraded to a full parish but the sad event forced the bishop of the Buea Prefecture to speed up the process.

From her baptismal card it is evident that she was baptised in 1926 and confirmed a year afterwards, and that back in Njinikom she was the leader of the early Christians who actively participated in the conversion of others to Christianity. She also tutored those who wanted to get married in the Christian way. All these showed that she was a semi-catechist.

Her room is full of religious relics. On top of her bed was the statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Behind her bed was the cross and on the pillar of one of her beds hung the rosary. All these were placed there in anticipation of the heavenly bounty anticipated in the after life. This shows that Juliana had appropriated Christianity and transformed 'fully'.

How transformed were those who appropriated the church and Christianity

The Credit Union was established through the geographical mobility of Juliana. But one thing is certain. Either in a person or society, transformation is not a total break away from what previously existed. The whole church hierarchy in itself showed new meanings in Kom. There were new meanings in gender, new meanings in doing things, new meanings in looking at the traditional modes and the traditional governance of the Fon was gradually fading away. Juliana illustrates how individuals can be responsible agents of social change in the society.

It is difficult if not impossible to maintain that Kom people who appropriated Christianity broke completely with their previous traditions. It seems that they were half way into Christianity and half way into their traditional ways of doing things. While re-interpreting the earlier study of Christianity by Joel Robbins amongst the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea, Heinzemann (2009: 58) was confronted with a similar situation. She informs us that the people lived with two cultures and it is 'above all in the realm of morality that contradictions arise. Indigenous ideas about social structure are in conflict with Christian ideas about the moral person'. Christians were soon going back to their

³⁴ Interview with Juliana Ekfwi, 30 September 2008.

traditional ways of doing things while at the same time remaining Christians. The experience of Kom was similar.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown the church as a technology which led to unexpected changes in society. These changes relate to the introduction of new status positions, which started with the questioning of Fon's power gender relations; and what could be termed new men and women. All these people were the result of new mobilities, like Reverend Fathers going on treks to outstations. Then finally we see in all these changes that people are confronted with (*kfaang*) newness, changing in different ways. One of these ways was in their thinking, such as the Christian doctrine of 'one man one wife'. Because they had appropriated the Christianity of newness women undermined the power of the Fon and his traditional authority. The daily activities of people were also transformed in the end. A regime developed around the church as technology. Christianity and the church indeed had the power to reshape society but in doing so it also reshaped itself as well. Thus, the church in a way is comparable to an ICT. But the complete transformation of Kom and her people was difficult as the people remained close to their 'Komness'. The Chapter has examined how the arrival of the colonial church and Christianity in Kom in 1928 was as a result of the Fon negotiating his political position with the missionaries. His position then became very central to the process of social change which went further to determine mobility and produce new social hierarchies. The Chapter has shown that there are various social hierarchies that also need differentiation. The catechists who deputised for the missionaries while they were on leave became important in the new set up. So also were the 'mission boys' who played active roles, as cooks, washer men, mail boys, milk boys and an avalanche of carriers who were always ready to become the Rev. Father's 'lorries'. Women were also part of this differentiation. In all these there was a possibility for upward social mobility. Overall, the Chapter has established that the Fon's position was weakened tremendously as a result of him accepting the church in Kom.

The case of Juliana and her role in the introduction of a Credit Union on which the chapter also focused is another case study in how people were changed with the appropriation of the church and Christianity as technology. But not everyone shared in this appropriation of Christianity to the same degree.

School, schooling and literacy (*ndogwali kfaang*), 1928 to c. 1980

Introduction

Western or Christian missionary education has been regarded as one of the most important transformative forces of African societies. Many scholars have conducted studies in different parts of Africa to support this assertion. For instance, Barton (1915: 12), stated that ‘missionaries are the creators of educational systems and the promoters of modern education in all countries in which they have tried to enter as far as China and India’. Hopkins (1966) concurred with Barton and related Christianity to socio-political change in Africa. Latourette (1965), Oliver (1956), Cavalcanti (2005) and Subramaniam (1979) have in their various areas described how missionary or colonial education was a significant agent of change in society. In Nigeria, Anene (1966) examined Scottish missionary education in Old Calabar, Southern Nigeria, and concluded that its schools were the greatest instruments for the transformation of Nigerian society, a conclusion Mungazi (1991) also reached in his study of Zimbabwe. That this change was necessarily wholly beneficial is however not the case. As Taylor (1978) demonstrated in his studies in Eastern Nigeria, through education the missionaries destroyed the pre-colonial cultures. But all these works agree in pointing out that missionary and colonial education were powerful agents of social change in societies.

The authors have not directly addressed these schools as ‘technology’ in the sense employed in this thesis. Nor have they showed how schools were responsible for the creation of social hierarchies. The writers Forster (1965) and Berry (1986) have provided some of the inspiration for this Chapter. Forster examined the geographical mobility of the educated workers, and their place and perception by other social strata in Northern Ghana. Berry carried out a similar study amongst the Yoruba of Western Nigeria and showed how access to education leads to class formation and the growing influence of class differences among educated Yoruba men and women. Iliffe (1995: 222) has rightly argued that education ‘became Africa’s chief generator of both mobility and stratification. It also bred individual liberation (...) obliging educated men to create the personal syntheses of inherited values and new ideas which gave the colonial period its vitality (...)’

This Chapter approaches the topic in a similar way to the previous one.. It attempts to show how the introduction and appropriation of school by Kom people led to unexpected changes which included the production of social stratification, new gender patterns, mobility and expectations, together with new worldviews and newness. These

themes will be picked up again in Chapter 8, where the expectations of *kfaang* are central. The school as a technology is linked to the discussion of *kfaang* and to progress. This was mentioned in the introduction and this chapter examines it in relation to school (*ndo ngwali kfaang*). The chapter examines the types of change caused by schools and schooling and its contributions to geographical and social mobility, and social hierarchies. It does so especially through the career of Anyway Ndichia Timti, an individual who admired *kfaang* and promoted it among his Kom people as was mentioned in Chapter One. How did the school engender both geographical and social mobility and shape social relations? How did education further determine the mobility of Kom women who were the first to receive schooling and who became mobile, independently of men's belief that women always followed men?

The mission school is the focus of a case study because in terms of scope and impact and the social change of Kom society, it did more than the Native Authority School (NA), which lasted only briefly. Besides the missionaries the British colonial administration also encouraged education in Africa by the opening of NA schools. The NA school had one definite advantage in that each establishment was meant to serve one particular indigenous group, so that these pupils had a homogeneity which was generally lacking in the central schools. Hence they were able to maintain much closer touch with local customs and institutions. All pupils had a local vernacular, a local folklore, and a local authority in common and every effort was made to take full advantage of the schools. Local authorities such as the Fon were encouraged to show an interest in these kind of schools and from time to time follow the Divisional Officer and the superintendent of Education on their visits, in order that they could learn something of that school.

The NA school in Kom was started in 1924 at Fujua. It was later moved to Belo in 1935 and in 1938 it was taken over by the American Baptist Missionaries who were in Cameroon at the time. The Fon, through the quarter head of Belo, empowered the Assistant Divisional Officer (ADO) for the Bamenda Province, Hawkesworth, to choose a site which was accepted by the Fon, although he continued to express disgust and annoyance against the Christian village of Njinikom. The school was officially opened on 22 August 1924 by the D.O., Mr. Pollock, with more than 200 pupils. According to Pullock, 'the chief of Bikom generously presented each boy with a singlet and a pair of trousers. Because of the estrangement between the Fon and the Christians of Njinikom, no Njinikom boy went to the NA school'. A cursory look at the partial Colonial Annual Reports which were presented to the League of Nations Mandatory Commission between 1927 and 1935 showed the following statistics: 1927: 64 pupils; 1928: 28; 1929: 58; 1929: 58; 1932: 29; 1933: 43; 1934: 30; and 1935: 52.¹

The responsibility for education was shared by the colonial government and the missionaries.² Exceptionally, some Kom notables contributed significantly towards education, although they themselves had not been educated in the western sense but were

¹ File Cb 1928/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division, 1927,1928,1929, 1932, 1933,1934 and 1935 (NAB); File Cb 1937/1 Annual Bamenda Division and League of Nations Report, 1937 (NAB).

² The British Colonial administration opened a Government School at Bamenda which was the first one in the Cameroon Province in 1922. In Kom the colonial administration opened a Native Administration school in 1924. Areas with Native Authorities were entrusted to take care of NA schools as they were popularly called.

widely travelled. An example is Anyway Ndichia Timti whom we first met in the introduction to this study.

His case is significant for education in Kom because it shows how *kfaang* was accepted by those who saw it as both new and good. He was a representative of the process of change and newness, *kfaang*. In Kom missionary historiographical accounts, Anyway's contribution has been largely ignored. Nkwi (1976: 166) dismissed him in three paragraphs and was more concerned with the trouble he had with the Fon in 1948. The church in 1990 celebrated its centenary anniversary in Cameroon where all those who had played a significant role in the growth of the church were recognized. Anyway Ndichia Timti was not mentioned, perhaps, also because scholars had ignored him or they knew nothing about him. In the missionary literature in Africa one gets the impression that missionaries were single-handedly responsible for the financing of the missionary schools with only occasional colonial government grants. Timti's example proves the contrary. It shows that certain indigenous notables had embraced *kfaang* and thus contributed to the transformation of Kom.

The Chapter is divided into the five sections. First, it discusses education within the context of the colonial and missionary agenda. The second part examines St. Anthony's Primary School which was opened in Njinikom in 1928, while the third part looks at the women who appropriated the school. The fourth part comprises case studies which represent the total regime structure that developed around the school as technology including the teachers. The fifth part takes a look at Anyway Ndichia Timti, who represents those who were active in receiving and promoting *kfaang* in Kom.

Education on the colonial and missionary agenda

The British colonial administration showed its interest in education by issuing Education Regulations and Ordinances for the colony and Southern Provinces of Nigeria Ordinances of 1926. Those regulations prescribed generally the methods to be employed in all branches of Education and particularly the qualifications necessary for teachers. The duties of the Board of Education, School Committees, Supervisors and Managers of assisted schools were defined; the minimum staff required in any school was laid down and the conditions which a grant might be given to a school described. These regulations came into force on 1st September 1928.³ The Memorandum on Educational Policy in Nigeria Sessional Paper No. 20 of 1927 gave a detail account of the main objectives of educational policy.

Those Ordinances stated that first, education was to provide a four-year junior primary school course for all the children who wanted it and a further four-year senior primary school course for those who could benefit from it. Second, it was to give an opportunity for the able child to proceed from a primary school to a secondary school and thence to a training institution or other post-secondary institution. Finally, it was to extend literacy amongst the adult population.⁴

The authorities did not mince their words when stating the importance of education to the colonial administration in the Cameroon's Province: 'The issue of education is

³ CO583/159/220, Report on British Southern Cameroons (PRO, Kew Gardens, London).

⁴ Report by His Majesty Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under British Mandate for the year 1927 (NAB).

very important within African communities but unfortunately resources are limited. We need to educate them (*the natives*), for we need literacy or literate people who will help us in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria'.⁵ This meant the authorities needed education first and foremost because they needed a literate class in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria of which Kom was a part.

Lugard (1922: 425) further amplified the ideology behind colonial education in the following words:

If a life happy and progressive so far as the individual is concerned, useful, sympathetic, and stimulating in its relations with the community, may be said to constitute a worthy ideal, the object which education in Africa must have in view must be to fit the ordinary individual to fill a useful part in his environment, with happiness to himself, and to ensure that the exceptional individual shall use his abilities for the advancement of the community and not to its detriment, or to the subversion of constituted authority.

In other words, the colonial agenda saw education as progress of the natives and the development of African societies. Through education the indigenes were meant to be useful to their environment by developing it. Indigenous population was meant to be happy and useful when they received education. Sound and interesting as the policy appeared we must not lose sight of the limitations of colonial education to the colonies and colonial people of British Africa (Rodney, 1981). The curriculum of colonial education both at primary and post primary level was meant to teach subjects which were to prepare the population to facilitate the smooth functioning of the colonial administration. Thus, arithmetic was important for calculations; writing was also important to enable the employees of the colonial authority to read without difficulty, and religious education was intended meant to instil the obedience of the indigene to his colonial authority. Whatever way we look at it, the colonial authority saw education as progress and technology too means progress.

On the other hand the missionaries were the handmaids of colonialism and were not much different in their attitudes and ideology. Both trained the Africans as auxiliaries to help them in accomplishing their objectives. The colonial rulers needed clerks, messengers, drivers, office boys while the missionary needed teachers, catechists, interpreters, carpenters, bricklayers, and cooks to help them in their evangelizing mission. According to Falola (2005: 15), 'western education and literacy were an important partnership of Christianity and colonialism in Africa. Both supplied the tools to look at the societies in different ways and to empower the beneficiaries to seek opportunities in the formal sectors of the society. Africans used the skills to improve their livelihood, others use it to teach'. Chapel and school therefore stood side by side, for learning was universally regarded by evangelists as the door to the church and, as has been widely acknowledged, the missionaries were perhaps the most significant agent of western education in colonial Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986: 1-22). However it is undeniable that the school as *kfaang* or technology denotes modernity, progress and looking forward, which appears the main reason why the British introduced the schools; they hoped to transform the minds of the Africans and so did the church.

⁵ File Sb/a (1938) 8; File CM 243 Education of African Communities (NAB). Emphasis added.

St. Anthony's school, Njinikom, Kom, 1928

In 1928, the Mill Hill Missionaries under Rev Fr. Leonard Jacobs opened the St. Anthony's Primary School at Njinikom which became one of the nuclei of education in the Bamenda Grasslands.⁶ That school attracted the cream of Kom youth and also many youth from elsewhere in the Bamenda Grasslands who understood the relevance of western education. It started with an enrolment of 89 boys and 3 girls.⁷ In 1929 the number dropped to 60.⁸ The drop-in numbers occurred for reasons that are far from clear. Perhaps it was due to competition with the NA school which had been opened earlier in 1924. In 1932 the attendance of St. Anthony's School doubled to 102.⁹ In 1936 the enrolment was 217. It was raised to a Standard Six School in 1936, making it a complete primary school cycle with a staff that included a woman whose job was to teach sewing, cooking, laundry and hygiene to girls. In 1939, the school had a population of 296 boys and 21 girls. In 1945 the population had reached 335 and out of this number 276 came from Kom. Also by 1939 St. Anthony's School was one amongst the three primary schools found in the entire British Southern Cameroon. Another was the Baptist Mission School at Victoria, and the third was the Catholic school in Bojongo.¹⁰ In 1945 the school was one amongst three Catholic schools in the Cameroon Province with a Standard Six class.¹¹

Although a Catholic school, its management was supervised by the colonial authorities at Enugu. Consequently, when A.W.B. Trevor, the Assistant Director of Education, Southern Provinces, Enugu, visited the school from 11-13 September 1933 he remarked: 'The school is still progressing very favourably indeed, despite the fact that Government loaned Certificated Teachers are no longer available for work in the school'. He concluded that 'the school was obviously doing good work in the community and should have a long lease of life'.¹²

Those who were already above the school-going age were given an opportunity to attend a Vernacular School which was also opened and ran by the missionaries in Njinikom. Helen Kiiki was one of the female teachers who attended that school and upon her completion, she taught there. She was born in 1910. She attended the NA school and graduated in 1935. In 1936 she was the first woman who taught in the Vernacular School. She quit the job in 1938 when she married Joseph Yuh. She took over the job of midwifery which while completing the course in Nso. She worked in Kumba, Bamenda and Wum area. According to her, it was a good idea for elderly people to go and learn new ways (*dzisi kfaang*) which were not only writing but also of

⁶ File No.Sb/k (1933), 2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 6/3/1928 (NAB) Also see Bernard F. Booth, 1996, *The Mill Hill Fathers in West Cameroon: Education, health and development, 1884-1970*, Bethesda: International Scholars Publications, pp. 66-67.

⁷ File No.Sb/k (1933)2, Inspection report Catholic mission school Njinikom, 6 March 1928 (NAB).

⁸ File No. Sb/k (1933)2 Draft Inspection report Catholic mission school Njinikom, 9 August 1929 (NAB).

⁹ File No. Sb/k (1933) 2, Annual Returns: Catholic mission school Njinikom, 1932 (NAB).

¹⁰ File Cb (1938)3, The league of nations report 1938 Bamenda division by M.H.W. Swabey Esquire; Also see File Cb(1940)1 Bamenda division: Annual and league of nations report, 1939 and 1940 (NAB).

¹¹ These statistics can further be found in File No.Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda and league of nations report, 1937(1937); Cb 1940/1, Annual and league of nations report for 1940, Bamenda Division (NAB).

¹² St. Anthony's primary school archives, Njinikom, SAPSA (unclassified).

laundry, cooking and hygiene, and it was unfortunate that the school did not last for long. She however, lauded the missionary effort for opening such a school.¹³

The partial statistics for the years c. 1927 to 1960 show that there was an acceleration of literacy in Kom partly because of the school in Njinikom. The D.O. for Bamenda, G.V. Evans, remarked that there were over 166 pupils and persons who knew how to read and write in Kom in 1928. The constant increase in the numbers suggests why the Catholics opened a Teacher Training College in Njinikom in 1944 under Rev. Fathers John Haak, Nicholas Bilderbeek and McCormack, although it was later transferred to Bambui in 1948 and later again to Tatum, Nso.¹⁴ The more distant the school became the more Kom people who were willing to become teachers were obliged to be both geographically and socially mobile.

In the mid-1950s there were ten missionary primary schools in Kom. The Secretary of State for the Colonies remarked in 1950 that there was a steady advance in education throughout the territory.¹⁵ The Trusteeship Council of the United Nations noted with satisfaction that the number of school children had increased by 20 percent during the period under review, although it also noted that the number was small compared with the total number of school-age children.¹⁶ If the number was far less than the number of school-going age it might have been that people did not have enough money to send their children to school or that type of *kfaang* was not embraced by all and sundry. Others did not see anything beneficial in schooling. These people preferred their children to continue hunting or farming or to follow traditional occupations.

The school played a preponderant role in the changing of the status of those who graduated successfully, became pupil teachers and headmasters, while some became very mobile in other walks of life. According to a 1934 report, matters had advanced so far that 'with the exception of class 1a Infants, [the school] is housed in a new permanent cement floor with two Kom teachers, Sylvester Ngam and Joseph Ndong already teaching Infants 1b and Elementary 1 respectively'.¹⁷ When the Assistant Director of Education, Southern Provinces visited the school in 1937 he said among other things that the school 'altogether (...) is a progressive and well organised institution. Both the present principal and his predecessor Fr. Hoevenaars have worked very hard to improve the efficiency of the school and have succeeded to a marked degree'.¹⁸ As at 24 January 1938, ten years after the opening of the school, Joseph Yuh, Joseph Ndong Nkwain, Maurice Nkwain and Isidore Diyen joined its teaching corps. Twelve months later, Isidore Diyen, a grade 'C' matriculated teacher left the school for higher studies at St. Charles College, Onitsha, Nigeria.¹⁹ Between 1947 and 1998, the following headmasters from Kom served at St. Anthony's School:

¹³ Interview with Helena Kiiki, Wombong, Njinikom, 21 October 2008.

¹⁴ File Cb/ (1948)1 Bamenda annual report for 1948 (NAB).

¹⁵ File AB/81. 1, Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the General Assembly of the United Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under United Kingdom for the years 1950; File Cb/1949/1, Bamenda Annual Reports for the years 1949, 1950 and 1951 (NAB).

¹⁶ Report by His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under United Kingdom Trusteeship for the Year 1951 (NAB).

¹⁷ St. Anthony Primary School Archives (SAPSA) (unclassified).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Table 7.1 Names and years of headmasters of St. Anthony's primary school

<i>Years</i>	<i>Name of headmaster</i>
1947-1949	Isidore Diyen
1952-1955	Augustine Ngom Jua
1956-1957	Mathias Nkuo
1958-1965	Anthony Yongabi
1966-1968	Clement Waindim
1968-1969	Leo Nyongo
1974-1990	Clement Waindim
1990-1998	Polycarp Yong

Source: St. Anthony's Primary School Archives, Njinikom

Among the headmasters, Augustine Ngom Jua and Joseph Ndong Nkwain became politicians in the 1950s and 1960s, while Clement Waindim rose to the rank of a supervisory headmaster. Jua quit the post of headmaster and became one of the founding members of the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) in 1955. That party campaigned in the 1958 elections in Southern Cameroons and won. In 1965 Jua became the Prime Minister of West Cameroon. Joseph Ndong Nkwain was the leader of the Kom branch of the first indigenous party in British Southern Cameroons, the Kamerun National Congress Kom.²⁰ That party lost the 1958 elections in Kom.

Jua and Ndong Nkwain were leaders representative of the new social hierarchies, and later the political ones too. Their ascent in social position in the first place was a result of their appropriation of *kfaang*, in other words the technology of the school. Politics entailed further progress if carefully played and as a result they quit their former jobs and became active in politics. Both became the leaders of the Kom branch of the first political parties in Southern Cameroon. Politics implied meant mobility - spatial and social. These two people represented such mobility at the highest level, especially Jua.

One of the people who graduated from St. Anthony's School and rose to the rank of supervisor for schools in Kom was Clement Patrick Waindim. He was born on 1930. He attended St. Anthony's School Njinikom from 1944 to 1950 and later joined the Teaching staff. He taught in the Catholic School Luh, Tabenken, from 1954-1955, and the Catholic School Nkor, Noni from 1958-67. From 1968 to 1969 he studied in England for a Commonwealth Teachers course at the Educational Administration at the University of Birmingham. In 1970 he became the Secretary of the Kom Sub-Section of the Cameroon National Union Party (CNU), the party which was formed by Cameroon's first President, Ahmadu Ahidjo. He became the supervisory Headmaster in 1974 until his retirement in 1990. As a supervisory headmaster, he was charged with the duties of touring to visit all the schools under him.²¹ The careers of these men confirm the role of the school and education in changing the social status of those who appropriated *kfaang*.

²⁰ For more on this see, File CO554/916 Kamerun National Congress Annual Convention held at Bamenda April 12-14, 1955; Relations between the Kamerun National Congress and the *Union des Populations du Cameroun*; File CO 554/916, Kamerun National Annual Convention held at Bamenda April 12-14, 1955; CO554/1055, File No. WAF 33/78/02. Movement for the Unification of the Two Trust Territories of the Cameroons: Dr. Endeley's National Day Message (all these files were consulted at PRO).

²¹ Cited from the Manual of Supervisory Headmaster, (mimeograph) SAPSA.

Women, schooling and mobility

This schooling was not limited to men only. Women also attended school in growing numbers. Their number rose from three in 1928 to eight in 1951 at St. Anthony's School as it is shown in Table 7.2. The admission of girls to the school was something new in Kom culture. The founding of Kom in the early 19th century was mostly attributed to women because they comprised the last remnants who moved out of Babessi through Nkar, Noni, Akeh and reached Laikom. When the foundation of the Fondom was threatened by the invading Mejang, assumed to comprise a stronger Fondom, the women were those who repelled the aggressors because their husbands had gone hunting. That incident according to the men folk showed that women were powerful. Still, the thinking was that women were best suited to be at home, following their mothers to the farm and taking care of the children. At the onset of Western education in Kom, some Kom men still did not believe that school or western education was for women. Some men felt strongly that the women should remain at home. The first eight women who went to school reversed that thinking.

Table 7.2 The first eight girls at St. Anthony's school, Njinikom

<i>Name</i>	<i>Admission number</i>	<i>Age</i>
Victoria N. Chia	941	14
Paulina Ndum	1059	13
Benedicta Neng	918	13
Rufina N. Fujua	1055	14
Mary Tosam Yongabi	1060	14
Francisca Chia	1058	14
Mary Diom	1188	13
Sophia Kain	1327	15

Source: Admission Register (SAPSA)

Not all the women who appropriated that *kfaang* successfully completed the school course. Sometimes because of nuptial matters the girl child dropped out from school to marry whoever asked her hand in marriage through her parents. That explains why many girls had to leave school before completing their studies. It was therefore more the decision of a girl's father. One of those girls was Theresia Nange Njuakom. She was born at Muloin, another village in Kom, in 1933. Her father was a catechist, Paul Njuakom. In 1948 she went to St. Anthony's School Njinikom and because of her intelligence she was rapidly promoted to Standard Two. She was promoted to Standard Three and subsequently to Standard Four. There was no Standard Four for girls in Njinikom at the time. She continued her education in Shisong. At the end of Standard Four she came home on long holidays with excellent results which had promoted her to Standard Five. The news at home was that somebody had come to ask her hand in marriage and in those days, as Theresia claims,

once your parents told you that news you were only condemned to accept. (...) because of that my education came to an end in Standard four. That was in 1954 and in April 1955 I got wedded to Lawrence Wallang. Lawrence was a Catholic School teacher. After our wedding my movement was dictated by my husband. Wherever he was transferred to work we went together. We worked in Tabenken, Oku, Mankon, Kumbo and several other places which I cannot quite remember.

The experience of Theresia was further confirmed by other women. For instance, Nyanga Clara and Mary Tosam Yongabi both confirmed that women were not allowed to continue schooling once they had a suitor and a suitor in those days never met the girl directly but rather met the parents of the girl. Once the parents accepted, the girl could not refuse.²² This was a similar situation amongst Ugandan women and men. In both situations the male folk gradually changed their attitudes.

Some schools were found to satisfy the needs of girls. In Uganda, the Gayaza Girls Boarding School was founded although it was to educate the daughters of chiefs and clergy while in Cameroon a Girls Boarding primary school was founded in Shisong and later in Njinikom and Mankon. A Girls Boarding Secondary School was founded at Okoyong, Mamfe in 1956 with 18 girls (Musisi, 1992). Abidogun (2007/8: 29-51) has observed that with the introduction of colonial and missionary education, gender roles were considerably affected amongst the Northern Igbos of Nigeria. Thus similar cases were observable elsewhere in Africa. The case of parents who accepted *kfaang* and still could pull their children out of school shows us that no matter how *kfaang* was appropriated, 'Komness' was still guarded.

As we heard earlier with the life history of Benedicta, in 1951-52, Rev. Fr. Groot, the school manager of St. Anthony's School, decided that girls henceforth were not to attend classes with boys in the same school. The only option for the girls was to trek to Shisong where a separate school for girls was found. The performance of the girls who went to Shisong was seemingly encouraging and the mission authorities responded in 1959 by opening the St. Marie Gorretti's Girls School in Njinikom with Rev. Sr. Assumpta Neiderstatter as Headmistress.²³ It is not clear whether the school for girls was opened in Njinikom because the girls who first went to Shisong had performed well or because the mission had already decided to bring school education to girls in Njinikom. Its limitations should also be noted: the school curriculum that was taught by the Rev. Sister stressed the teaching of domestic science to the girls, including sewing, tailoring and cooking which at the time was seen as a top priority for girls by the missionary and the colonial government.

The aspect of the girls trekking to Shisong needs further explanation. First and foremost, this is because it is often stated in the literature that women's geographical mobility came much later than that of the male. For instance, Clifford (1992), observes that 'Good travel (heroic, educational, scientific, adventurous, ennobling) is something men should do. Women are impeded from serious travel. *Some of them (women) go to distant places but largely as companions (...)*.' In other words, women always travelled in conjunction with men. The geographical mobility of women sketched here suggests a different photo.

This does not, however, mean that scholars have not studied the mobility of women as independent agents in Africa. Barnes (2002) studied the migration of women in Southern Africa, especially between South Africa and Zimbabwe during the colonial period. She employed statistical, documentary and oral evidence to critique the domi-

²² Interview with Theresia Nange Njuakom, Bochain, Njinikom, 31 July 2008. The case of Theresia was further confirmed by many women whom I contacted in the field. For instance, Nyanga Clara, interviewed 14 December 2007 at Njinikom and Mary Tosam Yongabi interviewed 13 August 2008 at Bochain, Kom all confirmed that women were not allowed to continue schooling once they had a suitor and a suitor in those days never met the girl directly but rather met the parents of the girl. Once the parents accepted the girl could not refuse.

²³ File cb 1958/1 Bamenda Division Annual Report for 1958 ending.

nant paradigm that women were silent observers of migration in colonial Southern African historiography. She stated that ‘when historians follow the dominant model and consider mobility, travel, and migration *a priori* as male preserves, African women are automatically consigned to mass immobility. They are barred from centre stage and frozen in perpetual economic childhood’. The author concludes that rather than a ‘limiting view of African women’s socioeconomic immobility in Southern Africa should be fundamentally challenged by further research (...)’. Using the concept of ‘navigation’, Both has sought to understand girl migrants and young women in Ndjamena, Chad. The work aimed to contribute to a ‘broader understanding of the positions of girls and young women in Chad’. Both concludes among other things that ‘the girls are not only being shaped by the urban structures, but partly shaped themselves (...)’. Kihato (2009) has also researched the migration of women in different parts of Southern Africa to Johannesburg. She concludes that these women used different methods to find themselves in different locations in Johannesburg. Thus the movement of women to Shisong inasmuch as it paints a different photo also contributes to the literature on women as independent migrants who moved without being dictated to by the men. The novelty of the photo is heightened because the women were not economic migrants. Their mobility was not informed by economic imperatives as the case of Barnes and Both has shown.

It has for sometime now been maintained erroneously that men migrate in search for money and women migrate because they want to follow their men. Simelane (2004) has argued that migration in Swaziland was dominated by men due to the existence of opportunities in the labour market, and he takes the economic factor as the main one which illustrated men’s mobility in colonial Swaziland. According to the author it is not correct to see the mobility of men in economic terms but rather more in the sedentary situation of women. The reason for the sedentarism of women is to be found at the level of homestead relations. Robertson (1984) went further to show that many South African countries including the Congo had restrictions placed upon the migration of women by the colonial government and the idea was that only men could work in the mines. This error has led to the paucity of material as far as women mobility in West Africa is concerned. Cordell et al. (1996: 39) accept the view that the history of mobility of women is limited except when situated in nuptial terms. While studying women in Burkina Faso she contended that ‘although a very large proportion of female migration is indeed related to marriage, the overall photo that emerges is more varied than might first be supposed’ (see also Lambert, 2007: 129-148; Cockerton, 2002: 37-53; Ulicki and Crush, 2000: 64-79). The case of Kom therefore helps us to start seeing the autonomy of women in migration literature especially in the Bamenda Grasslands.

In 1959 a girls’ primary school was opened in Njinikom, St. Marie Gorretti’s School. The population steadily rose between 1959 and 1980 as is shown by the figures in Table 7.3. These figures suggest that the minds of those who attended this school were shaped by education. Kom was transformed through their activities. Besides classroom teaching, a domestic science centre was opened in 1971, headed by a Rev. Nun, Sr. Mary Theresia. The centre was charged to teach girls sewing, knitting, cooking, domestic activities like keeping the environment clean, basic hygiene, and womanhood, to name just a few.²⁴ A similar school was opened in East Africa (Thurnwald 1932: 175-184).

²⁴ File Ci (1967) 2 Economic and Social Reports, Menchum Division, 1967-1974 (NAB).

Table 7.3 The number of girls at St. Marie Gorretti's primary school between 1959 and 1980

Year	No. of girls in enrolment
1959	25
1960	29
1961	32
1963	38
1965	45
1968	55
1970	98
1972	105
1973	115
1974	150
1975	189
1976	200
1977	210
1980	250

Source: Compiled from St. Anthony's Primary School Archives, Njinikom.

One result of education in Njinikom was the creation of a new social hierarchy consisting of teachers. They constituted the mould of new men whose rise was due to their appropriation of the school (Ajayi, 1965 and Beildelman, 1971). Their mental horizons were widened and they became geographically and socially mobile. They also stood out as the social purveyors of *kfaang* in society. The social mobility of teachers and of those who attended school implied great social change in Kom society. The education of these people, which helped them to further impart knowledge to others, seemed to amount to fundamental change in the nature of Kom society. Some examples suffice to illustrate this fact. These examples do not in any way reflect the experience of all the teachers who were interviewed in the field. But it is important to note because their appropriation of *kfaang* while leading to change did not amount to total transformation.

Biographical sketches

Jerome Ngeh Tim

Jerome was born at Muloin, Kom, in 1941. He went to St. Anthony's School in 1950 and completed it in 1957. For two years, 1958 and 1959 inclusive, he was idling at home writing letters for those who could not write. Later on five of the school's pupils were chosen to go to St. Pius Teachers Training College, Tatum, Nso. Four of his colleagues went but he could not go because of the lack of financial sponsorship. In 1960 Tim picked up an appointment in St. Gabriel's Primary School Bafmeng, thanks to late Rev. Fr. Francis Woodman, a Mill Hill Missionary and manager of primary schools under Njinikom parish. He taught there for one year and the next year he passed the Teacher's Grade 3 examination in Bambui. He was in Bambui from 1961 to 1962 and upon completion in 1963 he was sent to Djottin Parish. He taught in the Catholic School in Oku and later went on transfer to Mbim. Tim later attempted the entrance examination into Grade one Teacher's College in Kumba and came out successfully. He was in Kumba from 1965 to 1967. After that he was sent to Catholic School, Bali and in the next year to Girls School, Big Mankon. He was in Mankon from 1967 to 1973. It was at that time that he wrote his Ordinary General Certificate Examination and Advanced

Levels. All were supervised by University College, London. He came out successfully. From thence he enrolled in the University of Yaoundé and completed in 1977. After the University he was posted to teach in *Lycee de Bertoua* where he taught from 1978 to 1979 and was then transferred to Nkambe to teach in the Government High School Nkambe. Tim taught in that school till 2007 when he was transferred in 2008 to the Delegation of National Education in the same Nkambe.²⁵

Joseph Ndocha Nyanying

Joseph was born at Ngwaah, Kom in 1942. In 1948, a primary school was opened at Ngwaah by the Catholics and he enrolled there. Unfortunately his father died in 1949 and his successor took him to Anyajua, Kom. It was only in 1951 when he enrolled in St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikon through the help of his uncle. He completed in 1960.

In the 1960/61 academic year, he was employed as a catechist at Achain, Kom. He was there for a few months when Rev. Fr. Woodman sent him to Elemiwong, Kom. There he doubled as a catechist and as a part-time teacher. While there he was the only person who was writing letters for the people and reading and translating them, an exercise which many teachers performed in those days. That was an unassisted school. According to him that type of school meant that one could be paid anything determined by the manager. He was paid 2 pounds and then after the exchange of pounds to francs he was paid 1,600FRS in 1963. In that same year he was transferred to Fundong as a part-time teacher of an assisted school where he was paid 3,000FRS per month. While there he was teaching three days in school and the rest was used up as a catechist at Muntang.

After serving there Nyanying passed the examination to go to the Teacher's Training College, Bojongo, but could not follow up the course because of his poor financial situation. Rev. Fr. Woodman called him back to be a catechist at Achain, Kom. He was there for one year and was appointed as headmaster at Mbaw School. By then he was a C teacher which meant that he was registered in the PART C register of the teachers but uncertificated. During that time he was given the number CM14/07. He was at Mbaw only for three months and was transferred to Bafmen and the catechist there, Marcus Nkwi, became the headmaster. He was teaching more children in class than the children in the entire school at Mbaw. While in Bafmen Nyanying sat for the entrance examination into Tatum and succeeded. So, in 1966 he was enrolled in St. Pius X Teachers Training College, Tatum, Nso. He was among the first batch which studied for five years. The first three years was general education, and the last two years was teacher training. Nyanying left there in 1971.

After Tatum his first station of work was Njinikom. While in Njinikom he was appointed as a Grade Two teacher for 1971/72. In 1974 he was transferred to Ndop and it was in that year that he married. From Ndop he was posted to Bali Gashu and he remained there for four years and helped bring it up to the level of a class seven school. It was there that Nyanying sat the London General Certificate Examination, Advanced Levels through correspondence. After his Advanced Levels he was transferred to the Seat of Wisdom Secondary School, Fontem, Southwest Province of Cameroon for four years to teach Geography. From Fontem he was sent to the Queen of Rosary College, Okoyong, Mamfe. He was in Okoyong for two years. At Tombel he obtained his LC2,

²⁵ Interview with Jerome Ngeh Tim, 15 June 2008, Nkambe, Donga Mantung Division.

and was then sent to Bishop Rogan Minor Seminary, Small Soppo, Buea in 1984. He taught and at the same time started an external course in Geography diploma and finally succeeded in obtaining a B.Sc. He worked in Small Soppo till 1998, when he wrote for a transfer and was sent to St. Bede's College Ashing Kom.²⁶

Mary Tosam Yongabi

Mary was born in 1935 at Isailah quarter, Njinikom. She went to St. Anthony's School in 1945. In that year many girls entered the same class and so the authorities started thinking about opening a school for girls separately. In Standard Four she continued her education in Nso because girls were separated from boys and there was no separate school for girls in Kom. In that year the Catholic Education Authorities had authorised the opening of separate schools for girls in Nso and another one in Kumba. So it was decreed that all the girls were in Standard Four were either to go to Nso or Kumba and parents were asked to come and collect certificates. It was then that she went to Nso and continued the second term there in 1950.

After obtaining her Standard Six Certificate in 1955 she continued to St. Francis Teacher's Training College, Fiango, Kumba. Many Kom people believed in the tradition that women were good for the home and looking after the children. She claims that all girls performed very well because there was serious competition in their class. After successfully completing her Standard Six and Teacher's Training College, Fiango, she taught in Babanki from 1959 to 1961; Oku 1961-1964 and Njinikom from 1965-1968; Fuanantui from 1968-1975; Tinifoinbi from 1979-1980 and Njinikom from 1980-1988.²⁷

The school as a technology first widened the mental horizons of pupils who later became teachers. Secondly, it influenced their geographical and social mobility. The teachers also represented social hierarchies. They became the carriers and transmitters of *kfaang par excellence*. This type of *kfaang* was based on *gwali* (the book) which was known as *ngwali kfaang* in Kom. The reasons why after elementary school many of the pupils became teachers was because teaching was very fashionable and prestigious in the 1940s and 1950s, if the testimony with my informants is to be believed.

The school as agent of social change through teachers was also important in facilitating communication by writing letters. The case studies have shown that teachers were very important in that connection. They had the magic of using the pen and could write to the D.O. and missionary on behalf of those who were illiterate. They were those capable of shaping the opinions of people by imparting new knowledge. In some parts of French Africa, they were used by the French colonial administration to gather and compile ethnographic information of interest to the colonial administration. Jezequel (2006: 139-158) has demonstrated that the teachers had a lower status when compared to other intermediaries like clerks, but in the colonial landscape where very few career opportunities existed most literate Africans had to teach and write letters for the local folk on the side.

The importance of teachers in Kom was all the greater because they understood the white man's language and became what Okot p'Bitek (1968: 205) calls the 'dogs of whitemen' who understood English. The training given to the teachers was just enough

²⁶ Interview with Joseph Ndocha Nyanying, Njinikom. 17th September 2008.

²⁷ Interview with Mary Yongabi, Bochain Quarter, 13 September 2008.

to keep them on the margins of *kfaang* and was not intended to transform them into the equals of whites. There was a purpose for that education which was to serve the missionary and colonial enterprise. However, the uniqueness of each indicates that these teachers had a group identity of belonging to a particular profession and thus the identity of a common outlook which was writing, dressing and reading. Was their 'Komness' therefore eroded because they embraced *kfaang*? Or how they integrated in Kom society?



Photo 7.1 Two teachers in their official outfit in the 1940s

Source: Cosmas Njouchi's album

From their narratives which showed that at any one time one or all of them worked in Kom it is evident that they integrated themselves with little or no problems with the traditional elites. As new social hierarchies it might have been thought that they must clash with the traditional elites but it seemed never to have happened. This probably, was because teachers were the purveyors of *kfaang*. They represented all that society needed to progress at the time. They symbolised skill and neatness as writers of letters, the most used medium of communication in the 1940s and 1960s. They also seemed to be paragons of morality and discipline. Finally, they were those who heard, and understood the white man's language and hence worked as catechists and translators for the missionaries and colonial authorities. They were thus the measuring rods of the society. Any traditional elite who understood and admired *kfaang* would not run into conflict with a teacher. And as teachers, they were the first people to put on good clothes, wear shoes and live in good if not luxurious houses.

On the other hand, teachers were mostly from Kom, and they knew and understood that they held very important positions in the society. Some were even literally ‘knighted’ for their meritorious services. They supervised the construction of new school buildings, and sensitized parents to the need to send their children to school by telling them of the advantages of a school education. One example was Bartholomew Chia Kiyam who was born on the 1st November 1924 at Njinikom. He attended St. Anthony’s Primary School, Njinikom from 1938 to 1945. After completion he was appointed as a pupil teacher in the same school. He taught there till 1951 when he was sent to open a school at Ngwaah. At Ngwaah he had additional duty of writing letters to those who wanted to send messages to relatives and friends who were outside Kom. He also taught the population of Ngwaah about cleanliness and the importance of schooling. Kiyam taught for six years and was then transferred back to Njinikom School. On the eve of his transfer to Njinikom people lauded his efforts at not only teaching their children but also introducing *kfaang* ways to Ngwaah.²⁸

The female teachers represented the new patterns of gender relations in Kom. Their presence as teachers highlighted the changing gender roles which accompanied the introduction of technology in the society. As already indicated in Chapter One, the school was a technology in the wider sense. Since one of the functions of technology is to connect people and places, the schools were also literally new connectors. Even more important they were a crucial factor of mobility and of connectedness of people and places.

In 1953, colonial education policy was reformulated in order to train pupils in carpentry and metal working. To achieve this goal of industrial education the government created trade schools like the Government Technical College (GTC) Ombe to teach grade II teachers the basic elements of carpentry and metal work. The colonial officer in charge of teaching maintained that, ‘the aim of this training scheme is to teach grade II teachers in training the basic elements of carpentry and metal work. It is appreciated that not all will be interested in or able to teach this subject on leaving the centre but some surely will (...).’²⁹

In line with the above policy the Catholic authorities felt the need to open their own training centres. Consequently, in 1960, the Rev. Fr. Francis Woodman, who was the manager of schools in Kom, opened a Manual Arts centre. The centre trained boys in the senior classes in metal work, carpentry, woodwork, pottery and weaving, to name just some of the courses (for this type of education, see Hamilton & Aseidu, 1987: 338-355). It was intended that boys passing out of St. Anthony’s School would be acquainted and equipped with practical skills in addition to a liberal education. For that to be effective, manual arts were incorporated into the syllabus for senior classes which comprised reading, writing and arithmetic. In 1965, the Standard Six system of education was officially abolished in West Cameroon. From the 1966-67 school year when the Class Seven system was introduced, and 1998, school records indicate that an average of 58 pupils passed out each year from the manual arts courses with an

²⁸ These views were shared with me during the fieldwork by those who witnessed Bartholomew’s period in Ngwaah, like Nges Timti (Interview, Ngwaah, 30 July 2008). I also talked with Donatus Fointama who was the pupil of Bartholomew. He confirmed that he was a superb human being who did not only teach pupils in the classroom but took time to listen to people and solve their problems like writing letters and talking about cleanliness. Interview, Fundong, 6 August 2009.

²⁹ CO 554/1175 Education in the Southern Cameroons, 1954-1956 (PRO).

elementary knowledge in carpentry and metal working. Some of those who did not undergo schooling nevertheless received and embraced *nwali kfaang* and were determined to bring it to their people. A good example was chief Anyway Ndichia Timti, a pioneer in mobility and a model in the appropriation and promotion of *kfaang* in the broadest sense.

Chief Anyway Ndichia Timti: A new model

In 1951 Anyway spent £24 to pay teachers' salaries in one of the Catholic Schools at Fundong which he had helped to construct.³⁰ The missionaries and the colonial administration at the time communicated with Anyway directly as he sent them money for the upkeep of more schools in the Fundong area of Kom. A critical look at some of these letters is important here. They show the extent to which he was interested in *nwali kfaang* and also debunk the view that only the colonial administration and missionaries were responsible for school and major social changes in African societies. In his own right, it appears that Anyway did what no other Kom person, even those who had been schooled, had ever done. His role in promoting western education in Kom leaves no doubt about the fact.. A few letters from his records will illustrate his commitment.

Anyway Ndichia Timti
Ombe Rein
c/oNative Court,Mutengene
Victoria Division
16 June 1952
The Assistant District Officer,
Wum Division.

Sir,

I hope to bring to your kind notice the following informations (sic):

It is now a year and six months since a junior primary school was opened by the Roman Catholics at Fundong.

This school was intended to help the people of Fundong, Mbam, Fujua, Laikom and many other surrounded (sic) villages including even some of the Hausa and Fulani settlers living around this area.

The school did not seem to fare very well because the villagers were not properly encouraged to send their children to school and there was also a complaint about lack of funds for paying the teacher.

I undertook to pay the teacher (sic) provided proper encouragement was made to see that more children go to this school.

Last year I paid the sum of £24 for up keeping the school and this year I will pay a further sum of 30 pounds to make up the teachers salary (sic) which is £2:10s a month. I did all these with the aims (sic) that if the parents are given real encouragement this school can virtually become in years to come a central school like that at Belo and Njinikom to serve the educational needs of the people of this area.

Continues on next page

³⁰ This information was obtained from one of the letters which he wrote to the District Officer, Wum in 1960. I cross-checked the information by interviewing some of the people that directly related with the events. I interviewed his brother, Ivo Nkwain who spent his entire life with Anyway and who was present when he died in 1965. He confirmed the story. Interview 24 September 2008, Wombong, Kom. I followed up the interview with one of the first teachers who taught in that school and he confirmed that he was one of the beneficiaries of Anyway's pay package. Interview with Elias Yongabi, Njinikom, 12 October 2008.

There have been repeated threats by the mission to close up this school probably because they are running at a loss.

I feel that as the officer and all for this area you can help by writing and hold local meetings, encourage these people to make this school up to date and if this is done and the mission cannot continue its running, the Government or the N.A. can then take over because I feel it will be very discouraging if the people so let down (sic).

A school at spot is very necessary and should not be neglected.

We down here shall be waiting the news of what our assembly men have brought for us very eagerly.

I am looking for your reply and I have also written same to Kom council

I remain

Yours true servant

A.N.Timti 16.6.52

D.O

Ref., p. 18/19 submitted. I

Heard one Bikom man was paying the salary of teachers in the alleged school but I did not know who was this man doing such a good work.

Anyway wrote to the D.O., Griffith, to encourage him to educate Kom people to send their children to school. According to the letter, he also felt that the colonial officer should spare some time to hold meetings among the people. Anyway indicates that he had paid in some money to cater for the salaries of teachers because the missionaries threatened to close down the school. Taking examples from the schools at Belo and Njinikom, Anyway felt that a school in the Fundong area could play a central role in the education of his people. Writing from coastal southwest Cameroon, Anyway was influenced by what he saw out there. The coast was known as the area where *kfaang* 'began' and 'ended'. The Europeans had entered Cameroon from the coast and many modern things had their origins from there. Besides, the largest agro-industrial complex, the plantations were found in that area. After making a note on Anyway's letter the D.O. replied to his letter on 15 July 1952 in the following words:

No. N.W. 151/20
Bamenda N.W.N.A. Office
Wum, 15 July 1952

Mr. A. N. Timti,
Ombe Rein,
c/o Native Court,
Victoria Division.

Sir,

Education in Bikom

I acknowledge your letter of 16 June 1952 and congratulate you on your good work in helping education in Bikom. If you can spare the time I suggest you come up to Bikom and speak to the people about sending their children to school yourself. I must have spoken myself dozens of times and so have the Fathers I also suggest you write to your House of Assembly Member, Mr. Sama Ndi and asked him what he is doing to improve education in Kom.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your Obedient Servant
District Officer, Wum.

The D.O., in his reply thus referred Anyway to Mr. Sama Ndi who was the member of House of Assembly at the time. Sama Chia Fiel Mbel Yiah Ndi, shortened to Sama Ndi, was born at Fujua, Kom, around 1913. He was the son of Fon Ndi (1926-1954). In 1924, he enrolled in the NA school at Fujua, Kom. After his elementary studies Sama Ndi continued to the Agricultural College, Yaba, Nigeria.³¹ After his graduation in Nigeria he became a thorn in the political flesh of the colonial administration. For instance, he is noted to have said:

As soon as I settled at Home I was misrepresented because I had developed a certain amount of public spirit and self reliance realizing my obligation as a citizen of no mean order. The ADOs went about saying that I had come over from Nigeria with that Nigerian outlook to spoil the people of Cameroons. Such tales have these people told about me and all untrue stories. This is because in my early school career, I mingled with Englishmen, Scotchmen and finally (...) got somehow socially emancipated and when I tried to live up to this, it was a new thing to those demi gods in Dark Bamenda where the Whiteman is no man's social equal. But that was wrong of them (...) I was arrested maliciously, committed to trial on the coterie of sinister faked charges. But happily for me I was acquitted in the court of law by the judge.³²

With such a biting statement against the colonial administration there was no better way by which the D.O. would have responded to Anyway's plea than directing him to Sama Ndi who was elected to the Eastern Regional House of Assembly at Enugu. Implicitly, Sama did not take an interest in promoting education in Kom area. By directing Anyway to him, the D.O. was in effect trying to stimulate Sama to take up his responsibility rather than concentrating on 'attacking' the colonial administration. Anyway's deep interest in education in Kom continued as he wrote another letter to the D.O. re-emphasising his interest, on 26 October 1952. The D.O. replied in the following words:

I am glad to see you are still strongly interested in your home town's education. For your information I quote a section of Kom Council minutes concerning the matters you raised. Fundong School. A letter from Anyway Timti was read about Fundong School. This man had regularly contributed £20-30 per annum to help this school. How was council prepared to help? Council said they had told the members concerned to call meetings in their villages and parents to send children to school. The District Officer remarked that it was not in their minutes. The District Officer said surely this was not enough? Here was a Kom man trying really hard to help his country forward. Would it not be good if they could write back and say for every amount you give the village people will give the same amount. The suggestion was that Mbam, Alim, Fundong, Mbongkisu, Ngwa, Mentang, Fejua should raise (say) 1/- each per man for the school. In that case there need be no school fees and the school would go right ahead. Councillors promised to consult their villages and report. They did not seem enthusiastic.

On 27 April 1953 Anyway wrote another lengthy letter to the D.O. emphasising the need for education amongst Kom people (see next page).

The case of Anyway becomes more significant because it reveals somebody who was very interested in 'newness' symbolised by western education. To understand his correspondence properly we need to recognize the novelty of letter writing in colonial Kom (for more on letters see Hunt, 1994; Breckenridge, 2000; Sinclair, 2003; Barber, 2006).

³¹ Interview with Johnson Mbeng, Djichami Rd, Belo, 27 September 2008. He was a cousin to Sama Ndi. This fact was also supported by Maakom Membai, interview, Sho, Kom, 29 September 2008.

³² File Of (1931)1, Ndi, Mr. SAMA C. Of Bikom; File va/b/1952/1, House of Assembly question number 134 by Sama C. Ndi, regarding German emigration after World War 1; File va/b/1952/2, House of ASSEMBLY NUMBER 132 BY Hon. Sama C. Ndi regarding Development. All these files were consulted at NAB.

Chief Anyway Ndichia Timti,
Ombe Rein,
c/o Native Court Mutengene
Victoria
27 April 1953

The District Officer,
Wum Division No. NW 151/34
Bamenda N.W. N.A. Office, Wum

Sir,

I have the honour to reply to your letter, which I received on the 25 March this year. You talked about all the points I mentioned in my last letter to you.

On the 19th April, I had a meeting with Muntang, Fundong, Baiso, and Laikom villagers. These numbered forty-four in all. In the meeting, I read out to them the letter I had written to you and the reply I received from you. The matter in those two letters was deliberated upon from noon to 5 pm. At last it was found that their fathers can only be moved by the DO. They had a good idea of the advantages of education in Cameroons but their fathers can only be moved to accept education if the DO persuades them.

Beyond Juayang northwards, there is not a single school except that at Fundong. The main thing that impedes progress is the want of an adviser. *A courageous traveller never (sic) under any circumstances.*

You believe I want force to be employed in education. There are several ways of compelling children especially. Children would soon accept to be educated if the parents insist on that. This can be done without beating.

I was born and brought up at Abuh in Kom. I know the ways of my people. Never doubt what I tell you. I only obeyed my father when forced and so are all Bikoms. For instance, the Bikom were quite unwilling to dig the motor road to Bafmeng but when forced they dug it far beyond expectations. With persuasion (sic), little can be achieved in Kom. In fact, the motor road to Wum should have been regeted (sic) had force not been employed.

Now see the effect of this mild treatment. In 1950, the Roman Catholic missionaries opened up schools in Achain, Ngwa,ah, and Fundong, but all are closed except Fundong school, because the children are unwilling to be educated but caun't (sic) be forced. The Rev. Father then in charge only said that there was no money to pay staff of the schools.

I was unable to reopen all these schools but open one at Fundong. In 1951, I spent £24 and succeeded in sending five boys over to Njinikom School in Std. 1. this year seven boys passed out and the teacher's salary is £60, £24 of which is paid by the Roman Catholic Missionaries and all the rest to be paid by me.

The above twelve boys are a result of the work of one who can't do much but does not sit down to enjoy his unsuccessfulness(sic). It is the place of the Government to send advisers to all the 39 villagers of Kom to persuade the people.

What prompted the opening of these three schools in 1950, just in one area? Were the people tried or to be educated? To my opinion, they were tried. Bare with me, the Bikoms will never be educated except when forced. For instance, the D.O. himself, born of educated parents was forced to school.

I see that my efforts to promote education among my people are failing on account of the Government. You simply attack and knook (sic) out my suggestions without consulting my people. You should not attack any facts in this letter without the opinion of all Bikoms. Even in the CDC works here, labourers are forced all day long to work for their own money

Extend the contents of this letter to members of Kom Improvement Association in Njinikom.

I remain,
Your Obediently.
A.N.Timti

Although Chief Anyway had never been to a western styled school, his correspondence shows that his handicap could not prevent him from communicating. He saw the relevance of *kfaang* amongst his Kom people. Letter writing became very important to the British colonial administration as early as 1916 when the Secretary of State for colonies passed the Illiteracy Ordinance Act of 1916. By that Ordinance, people who had been to school were compelled to help those who have not been to school to write their letters. Failure to do so made them liable either to a fine or imprisonment.³³

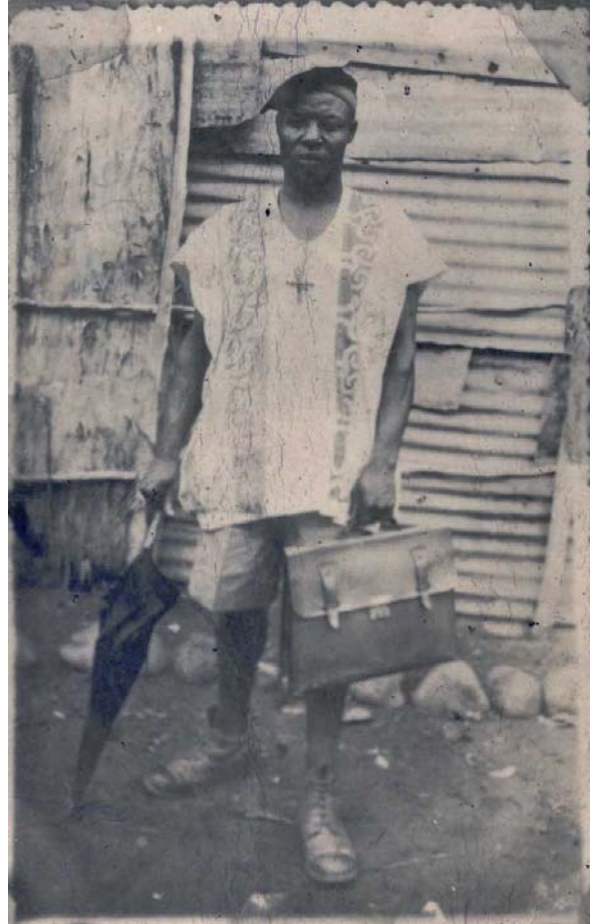


Photo 7.2 Chief Anyway Ndichia Timti, the person who championed *kfaang*. Note his leather bag, boots, umbrella and the crucifix but also his traditional cap.

Source: From his records.

Although that Ordinance showed how obsessed the British colonial administration was with its ‘civilising project’, Kom soon appropriated that medium of communication. Those who could not write employed those who could just as today those who

³³ File Cb (1916)1 Education in the British colony of Nigeria (NAB).

cannot log-in on the internet employ the services of cyber attendants. The letters in themselves showed inter-cultural dimensions. The letters opened up a whole cultural world, and the letter writers were interpreters for those for whom they wrote. It showed that those who wrote the letters were none other than Kom people who understood Kom and culture best.

Anyway's admiration of *kfaang* was backed by the D.O. who held council meetings to tell Kom people that he was moving his village forward but people back at home were not helping him as an individual. According to the D.O., Anyway had sent money to the tune of £20-30 per annum as an individual. It was therefore important that each individual should endeavour to contribute £1 each. Whether the people finally succumbed to the plea is not easy to ascertain. But it is very clear that Anyway stood as a pillar of *kfaang*. He had seen and admired *kfaang* and wanted it established in all the corners of Kom (for his letters in the original, see the Appendix).

Another issue in Anyway's letter which summarises Kom experience with mobility concerns his statement that '*A courageous traveller never dispairs (sic) under any circumstances*'. That saying characterises Kom physical mobility. Such people believed very strongly that while abroad nothing should prevent them from appropriating and promoting *kfaang*. Such eagerness perhaps lay behind a curious incident in 1950. A caravan of twenty-five Kom people assaulted a Customs Post at the French Cameroon border with British Southern Cameroons, killed a custom officer and injured two others seriously. These men were Kom traders and carriers returning from Nkongssamba perhaps with *kfaang* goods.³⁴

Although from his correspondence with the D.O. Anyway could be seen as a champion of newness he could by the same token be seen as a cultural deviant or 'subversive'. He was turning away the attention of his country people from their cultural values to westernization, so to say, but he himself by no means rejected all aspects of Kom tradition. The title of 'Chief' was conferred on him by Fon Lo'oh in 1954 in recognition for what he did to promote schools in the Fundong area. He became a Chief of Kom people in Bamukom, a Kom community settlement in Tiko, which he helped found. A parallel of such a person who, because of his social mobility was decorated was Professor Nsokika Benard Fonlon in Nso, the largest Fondom in Northwest Cameroon.

According to Lyonga (2010), Fonlon was born in 1924. In 1931 he went to the Government Primary School, Bamfem, Nso and later went to St. Anthony's School, Njinikom. In 1941, he obtained the Standard Six Certificate. Between 1942 and 1945, he attended secondary education at Onitsha, Nigeria. He then taught for one year in St. Joseph's College, Sasse, Cameroon. He enrolled, in the Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu, Nigeria in 1946. In 1953 he quit the seminary and enrolled at the National University of Ireland in 1954. In 1959 he read for a diploma in education in St. Peter's College, Oxford. In 1961, he obtained a PhD in comparative literature in Ireland. In 1961, he served as Private Secretary to the West Cameroon Prime Minister, John Ngu Foncha. Between 1964 and 1968 he was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs. In 1968, he became the Minister of Transport, Post and Telecommunications. From 1970, he served as Minister of Public Health until 1971 when he quit politics and then returned to the University as a teacher.

³⁴ Bamenda Province Annual Report, 1950-1951 (NAB).

Between 1970 and 1971, Fonlon worked hard to bring pipe-borne water to Nso. That project began in 1972 and was officially inaugurated in 1974. Chem-Lanhee (1989: 39), maintains that between 1964 and 1968, when he served as Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Fonlon used his influence with President Ahmadu Ahidjo to induce the Canadian Government to provide this much-needed pipe-borne water. The Nso traditional administration decorated him with the title of the Lord of Water. Thus the cases of Fonlon and Anyway are quite striking. Both had been geographically mobile. While Anyway never went to school he moved out and brought back to his people the schools which was much needed at the time. Fonlon appropriated school and schooling much earlier and that was responsible for his spatial and social mobility. He also brought to his community pipe-borne water which appeared to be much needed at the time. They were both recognized by their Fons. Therefore, those who introduced meaningful and tangible *kfaang* to the society were not alienated but instead incorporated, recognized and encouraged by the Fon. The case of Anyway and Fonlon suggests that many more examples of such Photos might be encountered elsewhere in the Bamenda Grasslands and wider afield.

Anyway is a striking example of how an individual can contribute to and introduce significant change in the society. In his case, he was obsessed with *kfaang*, as his letters have shown. From his example it could be argued that social transformation does not necessarily involve every individual in the society, but that key individuals can help transform a whole system. The case of Anyway could also be a pointer to many more people whose voices have remained silent elsewhere in Bamenda Grasslands and Africa and who did much to further social change in their respective societies.

Conclusion

Before proceeding to the next Chapter it is useful to recapitulate the main conclusions reached thus far. Essentially, it has been argued in this Chapter that the school opened in 1928 was to serve both the colonial and missionary ventures, and, more importantly, was seen by both the colonial authority and missionaries as progress and by Kom people as *ndo gwali kfaang*. Those who successfully appropriated the school and schooling achieved higher status in Kom and became mobile geographically and socially. The case of Anyway stands in sharp contrast. Chief Anyway was not educated but he was able to leave the place, migrated to the coast, and bought farmland where he cultivated cash crops. While in the coast he admired *kfaang* and started introducing it to his people by contributing in the construction of schools and paying teachers. His case illustrates that due to geographical mobility he assimilated *kfaang* and brought it to his compatriots even though he had never been to school himself. Similarly Ndocha escaped 'traditional' hierarchies and achieved prominence by taking advantage of the new possibilities created by the missionaries. One fundamental issue has been tackled in the Chapter: the role of missionary education as a form of technology that helped ignited social change in Kom including change in social relations. The teachers, who constituted one model of identity demonstrated how a new social structure can develop around a technology. New networks are ultimately fundamental to society and thus become its backbone and stimulate change leading to transformation. The Chapter has also contended that although the teachers embraced *kfaang* their 'Komness' remained intact. The next Chapter focuses on Kom encounters with different worlds of newness as a result of their mobility.

Mobility and encounters with different worlds

Introduction

In the last four Chapters, technology was central to the discussion of geographical and social mobility and *kfaang*. This Chapter deals not only with *kfaang* but what *kfaang* meant to Kom people and how they adapted to changes of newness. The Chapter also shows how the movement of people led to changes in mentalities and to geographical landscapes. In this Chapter we see place as a production of social space because the people shared a common identity. Thus came about the reproduction of ‘Komness’ in different places. Four places viz. Bamenda, Nkongsamba, Coast and Yola were important in the production of ‘Komness’ through *kfaang*. In these places and the way people talk about showed how they were influenced by *kfaang* and new things. Therefore, central to the Chapter are the expectations regarding *kfaang* held by Kom people. *Kfaang* is both outside and inside and people have appropriated it in language and behaviour. How were Kom people shaped by *kfaang*? We examine the psychology of *kfaang* and the interplay between identity and *kfaang*. Through our discussion of Benedicta, and our knowledge of Anyway Ndichia, we can see that such individuals were an embodiment of *kfaang*. This present Chapter is the culmination of the thinking about Kom peoples’ contact with *kfaang* which has been presented so far in the previous Chapters.

The Chapter goes further to illuminate the creation of Kom out of Kom by taking Bamenda Town as an example and questions ‘Komness’ which Kom created. Benedicta told us at the beginning of the story that when she was working in Bamenda, Kom people usually met at Kubou’s compound in Old Town. Most of the informants in Kom spoke about Kubou’s compound in Old Town, and like Andersson (2001: 91) who ‘followed migrants in their geographical mobility from rural Buhera to the urban setting of Harare’, I decided to trace the compound in Bamenda. From Bamenda, the next place which occurred in the oral traditions of Kom was Nkongsamba. How important was Nkongsamba and how did it affect Kom mobility? That will constitute the second section of the Chapter. The third section treats the Coast (*itini kfaang*) which was also an area which generated narratives back at home. Local people also brought to Kom many new things (*ghii fou kfaang*) from the Coast which were accepted and adapted by Kom people in Kom. The fourth section deals with Kom contact with Yola, while the fifth section examines the depth and durability of *kfaang*. Map 8.1 shows the various roads of mobility used by Kom people.

Different worlds came to mean different geographical regions and different mental maps of the people but ultimately *kfaang* in Kom. The different contacts created by Kom people established new socio-cultural pattern that had a significant impact on Kom with *kfaang* standing out as the most distinct of these adopted patterns. Did everybody embrace it? Or did some reject it?

Map 8.1 Some of the mobility patterns generated by Kom people between 1928 and 1998



Source: Compiled from archival, secondary and oral sources

Kom-Bamenda encounter: Kubou's compound (*a beiKubou*), old town

A brief history of Bamenda

Bamenda is situated some 72 kilometres from Kom. Its name had been wrapped in some ambiguities. The Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884 but it was only by the end of that century that they pacified the hinterland people by outright force. They first established a garrison at Mendakwe, the area from which the name Bamenda derives. Upon arrival in the Bamenda Grasslands, the Germans through Eugene Zintgraff concluded blood pacts with Bali people. For the meantime, Bali became a temporary base for the Germans in the Grasslands.¹ Since Bali was low-lying it is speculated that the Germans had to transfer their capital to the more high rugged mountainous Mendakwe about 35 kilometres east of Bali, obviously for strategic reasons (Awambeng, 1991: 4). Bamenda then became the headquarters of the German administration in the Grasslands.

The name, Bamenda, became prominent during the British colonial era and denoted the entire sub-region which was known as the Bamenda Province with its capital of Bamenda itself. It was because of its administrative and commercial services that many people migrated to Bamenda either to work in the colonial service or for commercial reasons. In effect, Bamenda was founded by migrants. Trading activities between the Hausa settlers and nearby groups soon prompted the latter to establish their own settlements beside the Hausa traders.² There they sold local commodities such as palm oil and kola nuts to Hausa in return for cattle, brass work and jewellery. Colonial reports show that between 1927 and 1928 the settlement had grown to a population of 753, excluding the European administrators and missionaries (Awambeng, 1991: 4). These settlements gradually increased due to the immigration of people from Bali, Kom, Bum and Oku. There is also strong historical evidence in colonial reports that some ex-service men of the First and Second World Wars who were also newly converted Christians were not comfortable going back to their villages,³ so they preferred to settle in Old Town.

In 1949 Bamenda became the administrative capital of Bamenda Province which consisted of Wum, Nkambe and Bamenda itself. Out of a total population of 264,790 of this division in 1953, 10,000 people lived in Abakwa, the former and original name of Bamenda.⁴ Abakwa also continued to play a commercial role and hosted firms like UAC, John Holt and Hollando and Barclays Bank International. The UAC and John Holt specialised in buying coffee and palm kernels from the indigenous farmers. These companies also retailed assorted products like umbrellas, buckets, spoons, bicycles and zinc.⁵

According to Fokwang (2008) corroborated by Fuh (2009), 'Old Town' was actually the origin of Bamenda even though government and local municipal records con-

¹ File Cb (1916) Confidential Report Bamenda Province, 28th February 1916 by G.S.Podevin (NAB); Also see Report by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the General Assembly of United Nations on the Administration of the Cameroons under United Nations (PRO).

² File NW/Re/a/1928/1 Hausa Town: Bamenda (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

³ File Cb (1924) 4 Report No.4-1924, Bamenda Division (Cameroons) Annual Report (NAB); Also see, File Ba (1925) 1 Report on the Administrative organization and Progress of the British Cameroons for the Year 1925, (NAB); File Ba (1924) 2 Report for the League of Nations, 1924 (NAB).

⁴ File Cb (1953) 1 Bamenda Province Annual Report by Acting Resident, A.B. Westmacott (NAB).

⁵ File Cb/1958/1 Annual Report for Bamenda Division, 1957 by Senior District Officer for Bamenda Mr. R.J. Elkerton (NAB).

sistently bore the name of Old Town. It was simply the name of Abakwa which was especially old in relation to the newer neighbourhood that had grown up over the past forty years or so. It was the Old Town whose name ran through most of Kom narratives in their encounters with Bamenda.⁶ It was also in Old Town that Kubou, a Kom returnee from the First World War, settled. It was in his compound that people from Kom constructed their home and saw it as a gateway to diasporic places from the late 1920s to the late 1970s.

Journey from Kom to old town (Bamenda), 1928 - c. 1970s

According to Kom oral sources, the journey to Bamenda was a three to four day trek from Kom, depending on which part of Kom the person was coming from. If the person was coming from Njinikom the journey took three days. The first leg of the journey was from Njinikom through *Ngwin Falla*⁷ passing through *Kikfiini*; went down *Ngwin Kwabeilla* (Kwabeilla Hill) and overnighing in Mbigou. On the second leg, the person spent the night at Babanki or Kedjom Ketinguh. On the third day the person reached Bamenda. But if the person was coming from Fundong the journey took four days because people had to spend an additional night at Njinikom.⁸

So exact was the planning that when the people set out they knew just where the night would fall. The arrival in Bamenda was like reaching a rest and relay point. While resting, people had to be directed and redirected to where they expected to meet their friends and relatives. The first Kom person in Bamenda was Kubou and his compound became a place which the other Kom people saw as a gateway which they had to pass before taking off to further destinations.

According to his oldest surviving widow, Catherine Ngeh Nayou, Kubou was born in 1908 and married her in 1928. He was a man of Ndonambang lineage from Anyajua. He was recruited into the German army at the outbreak of the First World War. When the Germans were defeated in 1918 he was among the Cameroon soldiers that followed the German troops to Fernando Po. When he returned in 1920 with other Kom ex-soldiers he bought a piece of land in Bamenda and constructed two houses at Old Town popularly known in those days as Abakwa. Subsequently, he built more houses and the compound became very large with three gates. It was constructed of local building

⁶ A plethora of archival materials have survived to show how Bamenda evolved in the colonial and post colonial periods. For some of the files which are found in PRO, NAB and Bamenda Provincial Archives see, File Cb (1916) Confidential Report Bamenda Province 28 February 1916 by G.S. Podevin (NAB); Report by Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in the General Assembly of United Nations on the Administration of Cameroons under United Nations, 1948, (PRO); Annual Report, 1950-1951 for Bamenda Division (NAB); File Cb (1951) Bamenda Division Annual Report for 1951; File NW/Re /a/1921/1 Hausa Town; File Cb (1924) 4, Report No.4-1924 Bamenda Division (Cameroons) Annual Report (NAB); File Ba (1925) 1 Report on the Administrative organisation and progress of the British Cameroons for the year 1925 (NAB); File Cb (1953) 1 Bamenda Province Annual Report by Acting Resident, A.B. Westmacott (NAB). Awambeng has provided an excellent work on the evolution of urban towns in Bamenda, Wum, Kumba and Mbengwi. See Christopher M. Awambeng, 1991, *Evolution and Growth of Urban Centres in the Northwest Province (Cameroon): Case Studies Bamenda, Kumbo, Mbengwi and Wum* (Berne: European Academic Publishers, 1991), pp. 4-10.

⁷ Ngwin Falla literally meant the hill where the early Rev. Father's were received by Christians of Njinikom. From the hill they were taken to the church compound.

⁸ Interview Anna Ayumchua, Njinikom, 10 June 2008.

materials – grass, elephant grass and mud. Its architectural outlook resembled the Kom palace back in Kom which had gates leading to different three lodges.

The compound used to be very busy accommodating Kom people who were passing through Bamenda. As many as fifty to sixty people were known to have spent the night during the Christmas period. They were coming from the Coast. The few women in the compound spent much time cooking for the travellers. Children were charged with fetching water and wood for fuel.⁹

Chia Kiyam, another Kom person who knew Kubou, says:

As far as I know, that compound started between the late 1920s and early 1930s and it was constructed by Kubou who had fought the First World War. He came back and remained in Bamenda and after sometime he had a job with the British colonial administration I think as a yard man. The compound gained its prominence because of the frequent mobility of Kom and after sometime it was given the title as Kom palace because even the foyn of Kom when he visited Bamenda with his entourage stayed in Kubou's compound. After sometime there was *njang* formed in the compound known as *njang a bei ni Kubou* (the njang of Kubou's compound). Many Kom people stayed there before heading through to wherever you were going. There was a lot of trekking done by Kom people and it took about 14 days on foot to arrive at the Coast.¹⁰

A significant remark from the above passage concerns the fact that Kom people had started practising their culture through song and dances, of which the most popular was *njang*. *Njang* is traditional music reflecting elements of traditional folklore. Most of the time the music and songs referred to important historical events. Those who composed the songs were usually perceived by the public as people who had received inspiration from the ancestral world. Those who danced and sang *njang* were men and women, girls and boys. Traditional instruments like metal gongs and a small drum are used during the choreography (Gam Nkwi, 2006: 62-76). Kubou's compound was also known as Kom palace. And the compound was a meeting point for all Kom who were passing through Bamenda to Mamfe, Kumba, Buea, Victoria, Nkongsamba and Eastern Nigeria. Those who did not know the way to their destinations had to wait at Kubou's for people who knew the way to their destinations. For those who could not find other accommodation in Bamenda, Kubou's compound provided one.

The importance of Kubou's compound does not only emerge from its role in accommodating Kom migrants. It was not just a stopover on the long journeys. More importantly, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, it hosted a Kom meeting every Sunday. Just as Schipper (1999: 2) has observed that 'throughout the centuries, human beings have created binaries, devising images of themselves as opposites of others and have embedded such images in stories, songs and other forms of expressions', Kom people also drank palm wine (a milky-like liquid tapped from a palm tree) and ate their traditional meals which consist of fufu corn and roast chicken (*abain ni gwei e katign e*). In that meeting Kom socialized as they did in their villages. By doing so they included and excluded others who did not belong to their group. The point here is that Kom people were identifying themselves through their culture but outside of Kom and at the same time constructing a home from home in the course of their geographical mobility. The cultural meetings were soon matched with a cultural association in support of the

⁹ Interview with Catherine Ngeh Nayou, 21 November 2008. She was the first wife of that compound and further maintains that the compound burnt down in the late 1930s. The fire brought untold misery to Kom who were always passing through the compound.

¹⁰ Interview with Bartholomew Kiyam Chia, Njinikom, 23, 24 and 25 September 2008.

culture as they felt and imagined it back in geographically bounded Kom. Lucas Kijem was another Kom person who knew Kubou.

Lucas was born in 1931 at Njinikom and he went to St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikom, from 1942 to 1948 when he obtained his Standard Six Certificate. From there he went to live with his uncle near Kubou's compound. After sometime he proceeded to St. Joseph College, Sasse where he graduated with the West African School Certificate, Grade I in 1956. He proceeded to Ilosogun, Nigeria, where he was introduced to elementary teaching by his teacher who taught him in Njinikom school, Mr. Stephen Tita. He then proceeded to a prison's training course in Lagos where he graduated in 1960. He worked briefly in Buea and then left for further training at Walefield, United Kingdom in 1964 because he had pressed interest in the treatment of young offenders in prisons. So it was recommended that he follow the course at Walefield. Returning from the UK to Bamenda, he was again sent to Buea. He succeeded in enrolling at the University College, Swaziland, which was part of the University of Wales, to follow a diploma course. He was there for two years. By virtue of his performance he was granted a scholarship by the Cameroon government to proceed to a Degree course. He returned to Cameroon in 1974. While in Cameroon he worked in Yaoundé, Maroua and Bamenda. He went on retirement in 1985. He has six children. Four of them are in the United States of America and two in Cameroon.

In speaking about the place, he reveals how Kubou's compound played the role of a palace.

I have never met him (Kubou) personally. But (...) I know much about him from the traders who passed through the compound and what I observed when I first came to Bamenda in 1940. He was very paternal and a receptive man too. The role which he played to Kom people who were always passing through Bamenda made him to become so important and because of the good stories of the compound the *nkwifoyn* of Kom through the orders of the Fon, Fon Ngam, decided to make that compound a Kom palace annex here in Bamenda. For all the years that I was here the Fon of Kom always slept there when he was going on tour.

Traditionally the compound was recognised. Kubou used to confer traditional titles on the people that deserved them and these titles were recognised in Kom without any questioning. The Kom meeting in Bamenda is a very old one. By the time I came back from Nigeria in 1952 the meeting was already in place. So I cannot even tell when it started. What I noticed about the meeting since then is that it is a rally point of Kom. It shows a very strong sense of belonging.

Their culture was seriously upheld. The *tamajong* was always there, the *majong*, the *ikeng* and cultural dances. Everything that related to the culture was upheld. Although we have only one Fon in Kom there was one here who of course did not pass through the ritual passage but who was well respected. In Kom, the Kubou's compound is generally known as Kom compound and it is the rally point of Kom people. When Kom people rally here they always voted their leader depending on how old the person has been in Bamenda. It is also the oldest Kom compound in Bamenda.¹¹

The remarks of these informants points to the fact that Kubou's compound was a central destination for travellers from Kom. They would stay there overnight and continue the next day. It was at Kubou's compound that people found their way and were re-directed to their destinations. The parallel of such a compound today would be the Global Positioning System (GPS) which people use to get themselves to areas that cannot be easily located. In the case of Kubou's compound we could conveniently see it as a cultural GPS.

That compound gradually grew in reputation and became the 'palace' of Kom people outside Kom. During the British administration, when the Fon came to Bamenda with

¹¹ Interview with Lucas Kijem, Old Town, 28 April 2008 and 25 July 2009.

his entourage to have a meeting with the Resident, they all stayed at Kubou's compound. One might be tempted to call the compound a hostel or a rest house. While such terms are not altogether inappropriate, they do not reflect the fact that no payment was demanded, and the Kom traditional way of thinking does not incorporate the notion of hostels. While at Kubou's compound people were freely fed. Kubou's wives and children were charged with the heating of water when people took their baths. In the morning they breakfasted and thus were prepared for their onward journeys. Kijem's story seems to illustrate to us the sense of social and ethnic identity and solidarity which was re-enforced by Kubou's compound with the social and political hierarchies arising from its existence. The Fon of Kom designated a Fon in Bamenda who in turn could also designate other Kom traditional officials there. It is important to note in the informants' narrative, the 'travelling to Kom' which meant that Kom were already shifting from their geographical nucleus. In short therefore, Kubou's compound was hospitable. It had a reputation and it replicated culture. Finally, it played a royal function by installing Fons. All these were characteristics of the Kom palace back in Kom.

There were also periods when travellers stayed at Kubou's compound for more than a week, either because they were waiting for their kith and kin or just to have rest. During that period they worked on his farms and if there was building work they helped to gather local building materials like elephant grass for the work.¹² One person who participated in building the 'Kom palace' (*nto,oh* Kom), was Yindo Mbah. In 1958 he spent one week there and became aware there was a Kom meeting was to be held known as Kom State Union. Mbah pointed out that while Kubou's compound rendered a service to Kom people, Kom people also rendered him service.

Gradually, the construction of Kubou's compound became the communal effort of Kom people just as with the construction of Kom palace at Laikom. Kom people in Bamenda as well as those who were passing through performed this service as if they were constructing the Fon's palace and did so willingly.¹³ The photo below shows Kubou's compound as in November 2008, almost dilapidated beyond repair. This was probably because with the improvements in the roads, the introduction of transport vehicles and the influx of many Kom people into Bamenda in recent times, the importance of the compound has dwindled considerably

The first encounter with Kubou's compound was the first major stage in the travels of Kom people earlier in the twentieth century. It helped to orient travellers to their distant destinations, while providing accommodation. In the process people came to be connected to others by using the compound as a meeting point. In Mbah's view people felt as if they were actually in Kom and were happy meeting others and making new friends. The Fon of Kom frequently visited Bamenda and honoured Kom people there and ordered *nkwife* nominated by Kubou as his *nchindas*, while recognizing Kubou as the Fon of all Kom living in Bamenda.¹⁴ In a sense Kom as home had shifted from being only a geographical location to something to be found outside the region's borders, a social construct and a place for celebrating Kom rituals. For example, the Fon of Kom would visit Bamenda with his retinue in full regalia, and Kubou was also installed with regalia as the Fon of Kom people in Bamenda.

¹² Interview with Nathalia Kuokuo, Njinikom, 7 August 2008.

¹³ Interview with Yindo Mbah, Atuilah, Njinikom, 22 September 2008.

¹⁴ Interview with Yindo Mbah, Njinikom, 25 September 2008.



Photo 8.1 Kubou's compound in November 2008

Source: Author's collection

Kubou's compound in Cameroon politics

The rise of 'Komness' fell together with significant developments in the politics of Cameroon. The formation of the Kom Association gave way to the Kom State Union (KSU) in the story of Kubou's compound. Kom people in Bamenda saw Kom through the eyes of a state beyond the confines of Kom itself, and understood it as a state worth taking critically. Kom people still saw themselves as belonging to the geographical location of Kom, the creation of Fon Yuh I (c. 1865-1912) with its motto of *Wain-Afojiina-Nyamngviyn* (child, food, and prosperity). But not only that.

One of the founding members of the KSU was Peter Diyen. Born in 1936, Diyen first attended the Baptist Mission Primary School at Anyajua, Kom, in 1949. In 1950, he continued schooling at Belo, Kom and in 1951 attended St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikom. He obtained his Standard Six Certificate in 1956. In the 1956-57 academic year, he went to the Probationer Teacher's Training College (PTTC) Mankon, Bamenda and graduated in 1958. In 1959 Diyen attended the Elementary Teacher's College, Bambui, where he graduated in 1960. From 1961 to 1962, he taught in Bafreng (Nkwen), Bamenda, and from 1962 to 1964 taught in Big Mankon, Bamenda. From 1965 to 1966 Diyen underwent an advanced teacher's course in Bambui. After graduation he taught in Baingo, Kom, from 1969 to 1970 and from 1970 to 1975 he taught in Marie Gorrieti's Primary School, Njinikom. From 1975 to 1985 he was in Fuanantui where he taught until 1995 when he retired. Diyen says of the creation of KSU:

All of us were mostly youths from various backgrounds - some were tailors, some were apprentice motor mechanics, carpenters and some were just unemployed. We were more than fifty. One thing was that we were quite proud to be Kom people in Bamenda and to live our culture as in Kom. During the meeting the issue of a name for the association was hotly debated. All sorts of names were suggested but the one that won the day was KSU. The main aim of the association was to bring ourselves kom youths in a more formal way. So they could help each other in times of sickness or

death. In case of death there were contributions to carry the corpse home to Kom. It was also to promote development in Kom and finally express Kom way of doing things and lead our children to know Kom culture since most of us at the time were living and working in Bamenda. That association met every Sunday and after the deliberations *Njang* Kom danced and within a space of two years Kom people had many more cultural events complete with masquerades. We also thought that those who were passing through Bamenda to places like in Kumba, Buea and Victoria would need our help. In that case there was no hesitation to help your brother or sister from home.¹⁵

Diyen's account reveals that Kom in Bamenda in the late 1950s had a strong sense of belonging which enabled them to help each other because of their identification of themselves as people of Kom. Cultural identity and the sense of belonging were two sides of the same coin. The logic of belonging implied exclusion rather than inclusion. People always felt the 'we' and 'us' as against 'the others'. Belonging involves selection because it privileged exclusion over inclusion. Once that process has taken place, it can be argued that identities are strengthened. Kom therefore formed their cultural association to maintain 'Komness' and to show that they belonged to a geographical area known as Kom. De Bruijn et al. (2001: 84) have argued that 'population movements have always been and are still important vehicles for self promotion (...) people sometimes create ideological spaces to constitute some form of identity which produces and allows for mobility (...) these aspects of identity do not directly enhance their situation in material terms, they nevertheless provide people with a social network, a sense of belonging (...)' Kom people in Bamenda as shown by Diyen worked towards that end and helped their kin to live together.

Diyen's reference to development in Kom needs further explication. Many of the Kom educated elite in Bamenda participated in development projects in Kom. These projects included the construction of a health centre at Aduk; a modern post office in Njinikom and school building in Fundong, which were some of the projects supported by the KSU. This was facilitated by the annual contribution of money from Kom people who could afford to help. Once targeted sums were reached, labour was provided by the villages in which the development projects were carried out.¹⁶

In 1966 Cameroon became a one party state. The head of state justified the step on the grounds of greater political unity. One year later the Cameroon government tried to abolish any ethnic formation. On 12 June 1967 'ethnic' associations were banned in the following words: 'any associations exhibiting exclusively tribal or clan features: (a) any association which claims to admit as members only those coming from a named clan or tribe; (b) any association which, without altogether excluding those from other clans or tribes, in fact pursues an object contrary to national unity' (Bayart, 1973: 127). This rationale was also put forward in 1972 in order to abolish the weak federal system and to replace it with a unitary state. The creation of a unitary state led to the centralization of powers in the hands of the head of state. As a result, Cameroon was governed by presidential decrees (Ngoh, 2004: 143-185). One of those decrees banned all ethnic associations, including the KSU (Bayart, 1973: 127).

After 1990, President Biya 'democratised' Cameroon and the formation of ethnic associations was once again permitted (on ethnic associations see Gam Nkwi, 2006: 123-146; Nyamnjoh & Rowlands, 1998: 320-337). The KSU was revived at Kubou's compound. Kom in Bamenda had grown in leaps and bounds. In 1998 there were more

¹⁵ Interview with Peter Diyen, Balikumato, Kom, 28 September 2008.

¹⁶ Interview with Peter Diyen, Balikumato, Kom, 28 September 2008.

than 15,000 Kom people living in Bamenda, working in all walks of life.¹⁷ In 1998 the Fon visited Bamenda and top on his agenda was to encourage Kom people to continue living their 'Komness' in Bamenda by respecting the Kom ways.

The following photos show the Fon's visit in Bamenda.



Photo 8.2 The Fon's arrival in Bamenda. The Fon looks on with a wry smile from his car while a young page is astounded. The interesting thing is the Fon in the car.

Source: Komtangi Julius Yong's collection

¹⁷ I obtained this figure from the Kom Register which was at the secretary's house, Terence Chambam, Bamenda, 28 January 2009.



Photo 8.3 A partial view of Kom people in their official traditional outfit receiving their Fon in Bamenda

Source: Komtangi Julius Yong's collection



Photo 8.4 The Fon's entourage which included the head of *nkwifon* notables *nchisendo* drinking from their buffalo horn and while kitting others with traditional insignias.

Source: Komtangi Julius Yong's collection



Photo 8.5 The introduction of a chindo to the *nkwifon* bench who has just been newly knighted. Note the coca-cola bottle and half bottle of wine at the far end.

Source: Komtangi Julius Yong's collection

The significance of Kubou's compound for the creation of 'Komness'

The Fon's visit, the exhibition of Kom culture at Kubou's residence and the creation of the Kom community in Bamenda show the construction and reinforcement of 'Komness' in diasporic spaces. It indicates that wherever they found themselves Kom remained loyal to their home. Taming and domesticating these places and spaces as in Bamenda signified the creation of new homes, seen and understood as a way of coping with life and culture outside Kom. The final place was home in Kom where they would eventually prefer to end their lives, as the cases of Benedicta and most Kom informants showed us. Here they can be viewed as 'essentialist Kom' from their garments. But in other respects they change as they consumed new commodities in new locales. The need to 'Komify' distant places and selves suggests the notion of 'virtual' and 'real' Kom, a situation which could be quite ambiguous.

The real Kom was the one that geographically mapped out boundaries in previous times. These boundaries however were not completely static. The introduction of Kom boundaries in Chapter Three showed that Kom was a negotiated and navigated entity, given the fact that much of Kom was gained through warfare and that the migration to the area that became known as Kom did not happen in a vacuum. The migrants met people, *ndonalii*, and also displaced others as well as intermingling with them. This occurred mainly through intermarriage. The migration to and the creation of the Fandom of Kom involved both displacement and fusion. In that sense therefore we had something that we could call 'geographical Kom' which was made up of a mixture of people in a geographical space. There was also 'virtual Kom'.

Virtual Kom was the one which existed in the minds of Kom expatriates, who belonged to networks of belonging and solidarity. But the virtual is also in a sense real.

The whole issue is far from simple. While in Holland I attended several meetings of Kom people who wanted to confirm their 'Komness'. There were many who could barely speak the Kom language. Some were married to European wives. That prompted us to critically engage in the question of Kom identity, not as a geographical one but the one that identified Kom people as Kom. The essentiality of Kom identity does not lie in language alone or culture *per se* but more in the craving for belonging. Kom people can adapt to *kfaang*.

These are indications that over the years the movement of people in and out of Kom and their encounters have added a new dimension to their identity or 'Komness'. As Nyamnjoh (2010) has recently argued concerning cultural identity, '(...) identity could be imagined and real (...) in a way it is an invitation to contemplate a de-territorialised mode of belonging where relations matter more than birthplaces in whether or not one feels at home'. He and Pelican further maintain that

(...) pre-colonial and post colonial identities in Cameroon and throughout Africa are complex, negotiated and relational experiences that call for a nuanced rather than an essentialist articulation of identity and belonging. With the Tikar *which Kom is included* as well as any group in Cameroon and Africa being authentic is a function of the way race, place, culture, class and gender define and prescribe, include and exclude. These social hierarchies assume different forms depending on encounters, power relations and prevalent notions of personhood, agency and community (Nyamnjoh, 2002: 112-113; 2007a: 73-82; 2007b: 305-332; Pelican 2006).

It can be argued thus that Kom identity has started to shift from the essentialist standpoint which we saw in Chapter Three that maintained Kom as being frozen in geographic terms. This dynamism in Kom identity is indicated by informants.

The transformation of Kubou and the continuous creation of Kom in Bamenda also brings up the primordial argument which according to Appadurai (1996: 140) maintains that 'all group sentiments that involve a strong sense of group identity, of we-ness, draw on those attachments that bind small, intimate collectivities, usually those based on kinship or its extensions. Ideas of collective identity based on shared claims to blood, soil or language draw their affective force from the sentiments that bind small groups'. Appadurai here was referring to the thesis that people who have a strong sense of togetherness derive their inspiration from kinship, language and geographical origin. Gheris (2005: 285) argues that 'there is a logical relationship between the person and the community to which he or she belongs. An analysis of the social network brings out this double relationship (...) The network is complete when its members are interdependent. Its strength and dynamism depend on the extent to which its members have confidence in one another'. In other words it could be said that trust and confidence were at the core of building social networks.

That assumption could also be argued to have been important in the building of social networks among Kom during the period of geographical mobility and the growth of the community in Bamenda (on social networks, see Freeman, 2006; Radcliff, 1940; Wellman & Berowitz, 1988; Scott, 1991; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). But as Appadurai also indicates, studies of identity creation recently undermine what had come to be seen as self-evident. Clifford (1988: 14) argues that 'Twentieth-century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures and traditions. Everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts (...)'. That comes closer to Kom behaviour and their attempt to sustain a cultural identity. The Fon and his entourage, as shown in the photos, are resplendently dressed, but what keeps them travelling is the urge to maintain 'Komness' or Kom cultural identity in a time of change. In the history

of Kom mobility, 'Komness' does not exist as bounded and frozen in time. The 'requiem' and 'dirge' of bounded cultural identities seem to have been sung by scholars such as Nyamnjoh (2006: 228-241).

Nyamnjoh (2010: 24) helps to clarify things in the following words:

If cultural identities exist not as natural or bounded realities, but as dynamic realities that are socially, politically and historically produced, then cultural identities or communities are to quote Anderson, 'imagined realities' not in the sense of being fabricated or false, but in that they are the products of imagination and creativity. The members of the imagined communities need not know one another personally to believe and assume their belonging together, *BUT* every imagined community needs to work hard to keep together, as identities are always contested and subject to renegotiation with changing configurations informed by internal and external hierarchies of interconnections (...).

Nyamnjoh's point is well taken. Kom imagined their reality and so needed to sustain their identity in any way possible. One of these ways has been for Kom to form cultural associations in diasporic places. Even when the state of Cameroon attempted to interfere with their imagined identity they hung on to it - practising their traditional dances, inviting their paramount ruler to visit Bamenda to reinvigorate their identity. There is a dynamism that maintains 'Komness' and that is hard work. The pictures as shown in Photos 8.2, 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5 illustrate that fact. Therefore to see 'Komness' in terms of bounded identity is to impoverish 'Komness' as a dynamic reality. This also holds true for other ethnic groups in the Bamenda Grasslands. Most researchers in this region have treated cultural identities as though they were bounded (for instance, see Ngwa, 2010: 132-145).

By and large, the importance attached to Kubou's compound was not constant all the time. It petered or dwindled out with the introduction of the motor car amongst Kom people in the mid-1950s. After that time, motor vehicle transport enabled people to commute rapidly between Kom and Mamfe, and thence if desired to the Coast. The law banning ethnic associations also undermined the importance of Kubou's compound. Only in the early 1990s did the compound and the process of projecting 'Komness' in Bamenda become rejuvenated when ethnic associations once again were legally recognised.

At various times what might be termed the 'Kubou factor' or the vitality of ethnic association, was reproduced in different areas in Cameroon and beyond with the same cohesion. A variation on the same theme could be found in Kumba, where the compound of Mbungson Yang played the same role which Kubou's played in Bamenda. There was Adamu in Mamfe; Ndichia Timti in Tiko; Jerome Gwellem in Victoria; Yuh Ndi in Buea. Kom constantly was addressed by its geographical location outside Kom. It was therefore common to hear Kom Bamenda; Kom Buea; Kom Victoria; Kom Nkambe; Kom Wum; Kom Mbengwi. These names denote Kom people who had been geographically mobile and were living in those places. In terms of comparison and contrast these places are all the consequences of one factor - spatial mobility which brought Kom people to their ultimate destinations. The dynamics which brought them together were the same and included, trade, the demand for labour in the plantations and working opportunities in post-independent Cameroon.

Knowledge of the world outside Kom spread rapidly among those with the interest to listen. Older emigrants from Kom acted as it were the role of the Fon. Those who left Kom without being sure of their destination could follow the paths of the pioneers, for instance, to Bamenda. The encounter in Bamenda at Kubou's allowed Kom people to feel at home, to pause for rest and to find their bearings. As Greico (1998: 704-736),

who studied the effects of migration on the establishment of networks amongst the Indians of Fiji, observed, the compound of Kubou showed how networks within an ethnic group could be established in the course of geographical mobility. It was above all, also a strategy for adapting to urban life in the course of geographical mobility (Graves & Graves, 1974: 117-151). From Kubou's compound Kom went in various directions, one of which was Nkongsamba in French Cameroon. Our attention will now turn to Nkongsamba. The story of Nkongsamba adds to Kom identity in a special way. Its importance lay in the materiality of *kfaang* or 'newness'.

Nkongsamba or 'Nkong', 1922-1961: Mobility and coffee

The earliest time at which Kom people reached Nkongsamba (which was fondly shortened by them to 'Nkong'), was in 1922. These people were traders and Catholic Christians. A journey to Nkongsamba took approximately ten to eleven days from Kom. These people were mostly from Njinikom, Fuanantui, Abuh and Ajin which were the hub of Christianity and traders. They hardly remembered where they paused and rested on their way, as was the case in Bamenda. But some remembered that they stopped at Mkongbu, a border village between French and British Cameroons.¹⁸ They started at Babaju and reached Mbouda the next day. The next stop was Dschang, and the third Melong. The trek was very tedious and trekkers were accompanied by young boys who fetched fuel.¹⁹

Nkongsamba was on the former German railway line terminus. It was 109 miles from Bamenda. Its importance lay in the fact that when heavy building materials such as zinc, cement and other imports like kerosene and salt came from Europe, they were transported there by train. In his report to the League of Nations, the D.O. for Bamenda, W.E. Hunt, said among other things that '(...) imported goods must be brought from Douala by the French Railway to Nkongsamba and thence 109 miles by head portorage to Bamenda...'²⁰

In the early 1920s and 1930s the place rose to prominence because of the goods that were brought there and retailed and distributed, making it a vital trade centre. This facilitated the construction of the 'modern' church in Njinikom, a concrete example of *kfaang*. The church usually selected only robust young men to go to Nkongsamba to transport heavy materials to Kom. The round trip to and from Nkongsamba comprised eighteen to nineteen days. More carriers and frequent trips meant more goods, and new things, *ghi fou kfaang*, one of which seems to have been coffee, recalled by Kom people as *fghi bangi sii fi kfaang*, red eye of newness, for its red colour. This luxury commodity too represented newness.

Oral testimonies strongly suggest that a long distance trader, Thaddeus Kuma Nanain, introduced coffee cultivation to Kom in 1933. He was born around 1908 and was baptised at Nso in 1924. He was responsible for guiding young Christians on their trek to Nkongsamba.²¹ In his experience, he had seen that when the coffee seedlings

¹⁸ Interview with Peter Yuh, Njinikom, 28 September 2008.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ File No.474/1921 Ba (1922)2, Report for the League of Nations 1922; Report on the Bamenda Division of Cameroon Province for the League of Nations by Mr.W.E. Hunt, District Officer (NAB).

²¹ Interview with Peter Mbeng, 65 years, Wombong, 20 March 2008. His father was one of the pioneer coffee farmers; Joseph Nkuo Chongwain Tohbu, 89 years Achajua, 13 April 2009. He was an eyewitness-

were ready they were peeled and dried. The first person to whom he sold the dried coffee beans was Rev. Fr. Leo Onderwater, a Dutch Priest and who had known about coffee from the Dutch colony in Indonesia. The priest preached about its importance as a cash crop, as a source of income to the people. Coffee cultivation rapidly spread across the whole of Kom and Kom became an important area of coffee cultivation in the Bamenda Grasslands.²²

Some of the earliest coffee farmers in Kom were Michael Tim, George Nkwi, John Ngongmbong, Gabriel Timchia, Sixtus Boo, Ferdinand Munteh, Paul Funjom and Pius Ngong. These pioneer coffee farmers became quite wealthy. They were able to send their children to school, pay for modern medical attention and build better houses with stones which were now roofed with zinc. Although these people were not alienated from Kom tradition, the architecture which they introduced estranged them from other Kom people who still constructed houses of grass and mud. In other areas which included the Bakweri, Ardener (1996: 216), observed that such buildings caused people to see their owners to belong to *nyongo*. In a single coffee season between 1936 and 1959 an average farmer earned 45 pounds, which according to the standards of the time was quite a lot of money. In 1985 alone, the money paid to farmers in Kom was 865.618.594 FRS CFA (Euro, 1,321,555).²³

The first coffee farmers were those who sent their children to school and were the first to complete their school fees. For instance, George Nkwi had six children and all of them went beyond elementary school. One became a university professor. George also sponsored his nephews in school and one of the nephews who directly benefited from his financial generosity was Henry Foinkijem. According to Henry, his uncle was always there to take care of his school needs – paying his school fees on time and buying his books.

Thaddeus Kuma had seven children. All the children went to at least elementary school. One of the children rose to the rank of the Regional Pedagogic Inspector for Biology. He was Nobert Kuma Tosah, born in 1951. He attended the Roman Catholic Primary School at Sho, Kom from 1959 to 1965. He enrolled in St. Bede's Secondary School, Ashing, Kom from 1965 to 1970 when he obtained his London General Certificate Ordinary Levels in 1970. He taught in the RCM primary school, Bonadikombo, from 1971 to 1972. He thereafter entered Cameroon College of Arts Science and Technology (CCAST), Bambili, Bamenda from 1972 to 1974. From 1974 to 1975, he taught in the Seat of Wisdom College, Secondary School Fontem. Between 1975 and 1978, he entered the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*, Bambili, a higher teachers' training college. When he graduated in 1978 he continued in the second cycle of that college in Yaoundé. After his graduation in 1980, he was posted to teach in CCAST Bambili where he taught from 1980 to 1996. In January 1997 he was made the Regional Inspector for Biology for the Southwest Region. According to him, he likened coffee to 'gold', which was solely responsible for his education and subsequently for his geographical and

ness to the introduction and spread of coffee cultivation in Kom; Bartholomew Nkwain, 65 years, Atuilah, 20 April 2009; His father, Nkwain Miisi was another person who encouraged coffee production by giving a plot on which a small cooperative was constructed. Interview with Francis Chiafukuin Ngam, 91 years, Fundong, 20 July 2008.

²² File Ag/1934/1 Coffee Industry in Bamenda (NAB); File Ac/g/1949/3 Coffee General Correspondence Bamenda Division (NAB); File Ac/1951/2 Coffee Production and Development in the Cameroon Province (NAB).

²³ Kom Area Cooperative Union Limited, 26 Anniversary Booklet, 1956-1985.

social mobility. He claimed that it was also because of coffee that his father was able to sponsor them in school.²⁴ These few examples show that coffee farmers became a new hierarchy in Kom. They gained new wealth from coffee cultivation.

Coffee was also responsible for the geographical mobility of Kom people. As more people became engaged in the cultivation of coffee and as the harvests of coffee increased per annum, the Rev. Fathers who were initially the sole buyers could no longer buy all the produce. They then advised and encouraged the farmers to carry their produce to Bamenda where they were able to sell it to companies like John Holt and UAC. That encouragement further increased peoples' geographical mobility. To transport the coffee to Bamenda in the 1940s and early 1950s, when there was no motorable road, meant that they needed the services of porters. In 1944, more than fifty carriers transported coffee from Kom to Bamenda.²⁵ When the road was finally constructed the services of porters were no more relevant. Only the farmers took their coffee to Bamenda.

It was during that era of mobility that the idea of a cooperative was born. According to Kom oral tradition, it was John Mbengli who first contacted the secretary of the Bafut Area cooperative, Fotuba, while selling coffee in Bamenda. That meeting was fruitful not only to him but to the whole Kom. Mr. Fotuba advised him that it was more advantageous to always sell his coffee to the cooperatives instead of selling it to the other people or organisations.²⁶ John Mbengli did not fully understand the idea of cooperatives, but it was so intriguing that he went to Kom to talk to the coffee farmers about the benefits of selling their produce through the cooperatives. Early in 1952, Mr. Fotuba convinced the coffee farmers to start selling their produce through the Bafut Cooperative Society.²⁷ By the end of the same year, Kom coffee farmers thought it better to form their own Cooperative society which they called the 'Kom Cooperative Society'. The brains behind the idea of the cooperative were Gabriel Timchia, Sixtus Bas and Patrick Nkwain.²⁸

Table 8.1 List of Presidents of Kom Area Cooperative Union Limited

<i>Name</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>No. of years</i>
Joseph Nkuo Chongwain	18/6/59 to 12/9/60	1 yr 3 months
Mathias Tingum	12/9/60 to 8/4/66	5 yrs 7 months
Joseph Nkuo Chongwain	8/4/66 to 11/2/72	6 yrs 10 months
John Sam Mukong	11/2/72 to 21/8/74	2 yrs 6 months
Joseph Nkuo Chongwain	21/8/74 to 12/8/75	1 year
Joseph Bangha Yong	12/8/75 to 1982	7 years
Francis Chia Ngam	1982 to 1985	4 years

Source Kom Area Cooperative Union Limited, 26th Anniversary Booklet, 1956-1985, 2-3.

²⁴ Interviewed with Nobert Kuma Tosah, 59 years, Buea, 16 October 2010.

²⁵ Kom Area Cooperative Union Limited, 26 Anniversary Booklet, 1956-1985(mimeograph).

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.,



Photo 8.7 The partial view of the building of the Cooperative Union which also houses a coffee mill.

Source: Photo by author

The first President of the Kom Cooperative Society was Ferdinand Munteh and Patrick Tim was the secretary. The Kom Cooperative Society soon inspired the formation of affiliated cooperatives with their own officials; most prominent were those in Muloin, Belo, Abuh and Mbam. In 1954 the Kom Cooperative was officially certified by the Registrar of Cooperative Societies, Buea, Mr. C. R. Austin, and on 7 November 1959, the Kom Cooperative Society was registered as the Njinikom Cooperative Society for the farmers within the whole of Njinikom.²⁹ The Njinikom Area Cooperative became the mother of all the ‘satellite’ cooperatives throughout Kom. In 1973, there were thirty satellite cooperative societies in Kom each with its own officials. Thanks to Kuma Nanain and his travels to Nkongsamba, coffee farming was introduced in Kom and helped to transform it.

Between 1959 and 1985, the cooperative produced eight presidents. Table I shows the various presidents of Kom Area Cooperative Union. Their importance lay in the fact that they became another layer among the new social hierarchies.

The objective of the Cooperative was to educate the farmers regarding ‘modern’ ways of cultivating coffee, and most importantly to bring to the disposal of the farmers new technologies of improving coffee production. Thus, fertilizers mechanical equipment for hauling crops, and insecticides could be distributed farmers at affordable prices. The cooperative also promoted savings and the formation of capital amongst themselves. The first people who appropriated these new technologies were John Mbenglii, John Chibu Ngeh, Thomas Mai Attaindum, James Kang, Kimeng Chufii, Andrew Bagha and Joseph Nkou Chongwain. The appropriation of these new technologies further cemented social relations. Not everybody could afford them. Those who could not needed the aid of those who could. By doing so, new relations were created, especially during the harvesting season.

²⁹ File Ad/1956 NW Re/2/1 Cooperatives in British Southern Cameroons, 1956 (Bamenda Provincial Archives).

Furthermore, the Kom Cooperative Society housed a coffee mill whose job was to process and transform grade 'B' beans to 'A', which were then exported from Kom. In the process of grading the coffee beans, some were badly damaged. Labour therefore was needed to select out these bad or wounded' seeds from the good ones. That role became the specialty of women, although men too were involved. Between 1959 when the mill went operational to 1985 when the cultivation of coffee dropped significantly because of the failure in world prices of coffee, as many as 3,000 people were employed in these jobs. Such people came from all over Kom. The social lives of these people were further improved as they could now afford to send their children to school, purchase salt, palm oil, clothes and shoes, which were the basic necessities. Again it could be contended that mobility from Kom dropped within those years as job prospects in the area improved.

The introduction of coffee in Kom played an ambivalent role with respect to traditional political elites. First, it was embraced by the traditional elites through Fon Ndi (1926-1954) who encouraged his people to participate in the cultivation of the new crop. Areas that became the hub of cultivating it because of favourable climate and soils were Abuh, Ngwaah and Anyajua. In these areas men married as many as four wives. Whether the new crop was really responsible for this trend cannot be definitively demonstrated, but certainly it can be speculated that farmers needed more family labour for the harvesting and processing of the new crop. Many women also meant many children who helped in the cultivation of coffee. By 1985, most houses in Kom were roofed with zinc. This was suggestive that much wealth had come into Kom through coffee.

The connection between geographical mobility and social change in Kom are nowhere better illustrated than in the case of Kuma Nanain. His contact with Nkongsamba led directly to the development of coffee cultivation in his home region. Coffee growing was to become one of the economic mainstays of Kom. It improved social relations, and of course as Iliffe (1995: 219) for example has noted, it demonstrated that 'migrants could nevertheless be innovators, returning with new crops (...)' Kuma Nanain and a host of other Kom migrants brought many new things in to Kom.

But it could also rightly be argued that sameness was also created over distance, in different geographical places. Kom innovators seized on advances elsewhere to bring to their homes. One simple item was that of zinc, also introduced via Nkongsamba. With the advent of this material, domestic architecture underwent a significant change towards that which was already happening in other regions of the country. Villagers appreciated the qualities of zinc as a durable and versatile material that would withstand the elements better than the traditional grass-thatched roofs of the average dwelling. Zinc came to be a substitute for grass and was known as *akas a Kfaang* ('Zinc of newness'). By the mid-1960s grass-thatched houses were already disappearing, although some could still be seen in the next century. Other innovations of the everyday type that derived from people's experience in 'Nkong' were the new umbrellas (*ghii bwa Kfaang*) and hoes (*fysii Kfaang*). The types of umbrellas normally were made of bamboo, and according to most informants could only be used by one person. The form of umbrella in 'Nkong' was one that allowed two to stand under it. Similarly, hoes made of superior material replaced the old iron hoes that had long been in use. The old hoe was not very durable, and was not easily repaired, partly because of a lack of repairers at the time in Kom.

These new artefacts seemed to have influenced identity construction. People with zinc roofed houses could quickly identify themselves as people who were modern, men of newness compared with those who were still living in grass-thatched houses. That was also true of people who had 'new' umbrellas and hoes. Everyday materiality shifted perceptions of identity, just as the appropriation of these items demonstrated an appreciation for economic and social practicalities.

Going to the coast (*Itini kfaang*), 1928 - c. 1960s

Kom people migrated for several reasons in the late 1920s, 1930s and the late 1960s. In the case of migration to the Coast, people went for both economic and prestige reasons. According to Roberts (1986: 224), 'by the early 20th Century, the pressures of capitalist enterprise had begun to draw most people in Africa along new routes to congregate in new centers of production. The search for wages moved men to cover greater distances on foot and in trucks (...) and work places and plantations became forums for the exchange of new ideas'. Just as with Fuh (2009), who studied youths in Bamenda, Northwest Cameroon, Ali (2007) argued amongst the Muslims of Hyderabad, India that 'Young people who grow up and come of age increasingly expect to migrate internationally in the course of their lives (...) Those who do not attempt to migrate are seen by the community as lazy, un-enterprising and undesirable as potential mates'. Kom people were not very different although some just travelled to make 'appearances' (2009), and show off to people back in Kom that they had been to a very different place from home. Similarly, Kom people went to the Coast to show that their enterprise. These and several other reasons explain why Kom people went to the Coast. The purpose of this section thus is to show how they encountered the Coast and the impact of that encounter on them and eventually on Kom society in general. According to Jerome Ngeh Tim:

The usual appellation of Coast in Kom language was *itini kfaang* meaning the modern down or down of newness. *Kfaang* in those days was just an encounter with the white ways and the whites themselves who came through the sea. The name Coast meant coastline where the ocean meets with the land but at the time it denoted places like Tiko, and Victoria. But the name Coast came to be used generally to mean places like Kumba, Buea, Muyuka, Muyenge, Victoria and Mundoni. All became Coast. In general it only meant going to somewhere more superior than the area of departure. These people went to these areas for many reasons. Some just went for adventurous reasons because they heard interesting stories about the ship and the sea. Stories about the sea were circulated that it used to move in the morning and in the evening it will return with fish. People back at home wondered aloud and in silence how water can move in the morning and return in the evening. If something is water how does it go to the (sic) bush in the morning and comes back in the evening? Those stories were beyond human imagination. Added to these stories was the fact that whenever the water came back, it brought fish that was deposited at the banks. It was too strange for people to understand these stories and so wanted to see for themselves. Those who were privileged to visit the Coast went back with stories about the ship especially the one that was referred to as the launch. These stories provoked adventurous migrations. Besides, those who first came in contact with the sea water referred to it as *salt wata* because it was salty water. Some went down as plantation recruits to work in the various plantations. Some were carried down by their relatives. Some went to work farms in what they called 'two party'³⁰; some went to perform household chores and some went to work with the Public Works Department.

³⁰ 'Two party' is really a pidgin phrase which means that two people will invest their energies on farming either coffee or cocoa and at the end of the cultivation, they sell their produce and divide the proceeds.

The journey to the Coast was nine days, sometimes ten or eleven days, depending on the part of the Coast concerned. For example, a journey from Kom to Buea, 203 miles, took 16 days. To Kumba it was 153 miles and took 12 days.³¹ To Victoria it was 175 miles and took 17 or 18 days.³² The way Kom people perceived those who had been to the Coast was different. Those who returned from the Coast were seen as having changed in their behaviour, dress and language. They were thus seen by those at home, as those who had gone to the ends of the world and embraced *Kfaang*. And when they returned these migrants saw themselves as a class apart from those who had not travelled out of Kom.

Whenever two people from the Coast met in the village, Tim continues,

their conversation will be something like English but all was confusion. This was to show off and to show that they were from the Coast. The language was at times quite deplorable but the idea was to show that they were from the Coast which was more superior than the village. One will be speaking pure English while the other will be talking pidgin English in any other. They had dresses which people back in the village never had. They also had shoes and soap to wash their dresses.

Shoes attracted particular attention because it was very rare to see a villager with shoes. There were some particular shoes called 2:10 which were bought for £2:10 (he laughs). In those days to have a pound was 'news' therefore if somebody could afford to buy a pair of shoes costing £2:10 he was really a hero. When such people attended public gatherings especially the church they caused attraction by the way they were walking and the noise from the heels of their shoes.

Some were very pretentious. For example, some will buy new underwear like a singlet which was white and then intentionally tear it. In the morning, they put it on and tie a loin. People will look and whisper to each other 'this Coast people could maintain cleanliness. See how somebody will put on a singlet for ages and it is still as white as he bought it. What do they use to wash this type of clothes'. They insisted on cleanliness although most of them came from dirtier places than the village. I personally observed this with some of my relatives. When the 'Coasters' came home it was the practice that they gave out soap to those who visited them. This soap was to be used in washing clothes and the children's clothes. To give soap to somebody was not an easy thing. The soap was usually long and the owner used a box of matches to measure the pieces. There was another soap which was branded with a key. The key indicated cutting point. The key soap was given to people held in high esteem like fiancés or in-laws and other close relatives. The common which was divided using a box of match was given to any passer-by.

If one had a grandmother or mother and gave to her a piece of cloth, she was most grateful. In the night the Coasters went around in the neighbourhoods using a torch which caused a lot of consternation because people had not seen a torch before. In any house that somebody from the Coast entered people wondered what type of fire the torch was carrying which was not hot. Some went around with a radio which was the more embarrassing that people were talking inside a box.

Some went home with rice (*akuni kfaang*) which was a delicacy because it was very scarce. In any case it appeared to me that those who came home created new relations and even reinforced the old ones. For instance, some people will admire those from the Coast and create new relations by washing their clothes or polishing shoes or following them wherever they went. Others depended on the 'Coaster guys' to get modern things like matches, soap, clothes and even shoes. They looked very strange and mysterious too in the way they dressed with shoes, eye glasses, ties, flat hats etc. Some stayed for long without ever coming back home and when they returned their relatives could not recognise them and so started to run away.³³

This all reveals 'Komness', newness, change and *kfaang*. The wave of Kom migrants to the Coast returned home with stories of the wonders of the Coast and the sea. Their

³¹ Report on the Bamenda Division of the Cameroons Province for the League of Nations by District Officer, W.E. Hunt, 1922 (NAB).

³² Ibid.

³³ Interview with Jerome Ngeh Tim, Moh Road, Nkambe, 14 June 2008.

dress and their speech made them seem ‘superior’ to their kinsmen back at home. What did these *salt wata* and Coastal narratives signify for the minds and encounters of Kom people and the socio-geographical landscape of Kom in general? Their new dress style made them look like mysterious persons to their peers because it was unlike traditional Kom dress style. The new clothes from the Coast led Kom people to call the new dress *dzizi kfaang*, clothes of newness. The returnees themselves had changed in their thinking, sometimes trying to talk a language that they themselves had not mastered well, and behaved differently from local folk, and so represented a new social stratum in Kom.

The purveyors of *kfaang* and sharing *kfaang* things

From Jerome we gather that the stories from the Coast and the new things which the sojourners brought home encouraged many more people to go to the Coast. Gifts of soap, salt, matches, clothes and other basic necessities, impressed locals. Their ownership was seen as a measure of success and brought returning migrants enhanced status and prestige. The success of an individual was determined by his community and not by the person himself. Therefore the more goods somebody coming from the Coast brought and shared with kith and kin, the more success the community registered in his name. That appeared to be deeply rooted amongst the traditional way of Kom thinking. In the distant past when the geographical mobility of Kom people was to the farmlands of Njinikijem, Mejung, Mejang and Mbueni all farm villages in Kom - people spent weeks and months on the farm. The day of returning was a great success if a person could bring home a basket full of harvest goods and distribute some of the produce among neighbours. Conversely, the person who came home from the farms with an empty basket and had nothing to share with his kinsmen and neighbours was not considered a success by his community. In like manner, hunters were rated in the same way as farmers (Rowlands, 1995 and Warnier, 1993), depending on how much game they brought back from the hunt. These gifts were shared first with very close relatives – uncles, aunts, parents, brothers and sisters – before friends, in order to avoid any potential ill luck or curse. Thus, people shared in *kfaang* in many more ways even if they did not venture out of Kom.

Whether somebody succeeded or failed might depend at what time of the day the migrant returned. Thus, if one arrived in Kom during the night and surprised his neighbours and family, he or she was deemed a success. If one arrived during the day and was seen arriving, one was deemed to have failed. According to many informants, home-coming from the Coast occurred in stages. This explains why most people came in the night.³⁴ Some, returnees even hid in the bush nearby until nightfall before entering the village. Also home coming from the Coast was generally a special occasion for an extended family to tidy the compound. Once it became known in the morning that somebody from the Coast had returned, the whole neighbourhood gathered to welcome the repatriate. That was not only to get the ‘funkies’ of the Coast.³⁵ It was also to ask for news about other friends or relatives and to receive mail, especially if the person from the Coast came from a place where relatives or friends were also to be

³⁴ Interview with Linus Chah, Njinkom, 26 June 2008. He had come home in the night in March 1964 with his brother-in-law William Ful.

³⁵ Ibid.

found. Others crowded in to the 'Coaster's house' only to admire somebody who had returned from the Coast as a *kfaang* person.³⁶ In short, those who had managed to make it to the Coast and then return to Kom with evidence of their success were generally perceived by those in Kom to have changed both mentally and physically, and it seemed that these changes had impacted on development back at home.

Local people were intrigued by the surprise return of migrants from the Coast, but more so by their appearance, 'mystifying and strange because of the way they dressed and appeared'.³⁷ In the geographical mobility of successful Kom it might be that night-time return held significance, although this topic has not been really covered in the literature of mobility. Most works on migration like Cordell et al. (2000), Whitman (2000), Lambert, (2007), and Martin et al. (2005), have not informed us so. Jerome's claims about the Coastal people's appearance and dress mentioned above, together with their 'glasses, ties, coats and handkerchiefs etc',³⁸ deepened the impression they made. All of this represented *kfaang* and also showed 'modern conveniences'. But at a deeper level it meant more. Kom people who had never witnessed such dress styles saw the returnees as people who could also bring ill luck to the community. The returnees were seen as '*nyongo*' (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 241-269), because Kom did not understand where people got the money with which to buy such things in so short a time (Ardener, 1960 and Geschiere, 1995).

Ardener (1996: 216) has undertaken research in the Coastal areas of Cameroon where new forms of witchcraft were just emerging. These new forms included the way of dressing, acquiring new things like motor cars, eye glasses and shoes. According to him, such people who amassed such materiality belonged to *nyongo* and that notion was popularly held amongst the Bakweri until the 1950s. By coincidence it was at that time that most Kom people were moving to and from the Coast. Figures show that Kom people's mobility to and from the Coast reached its peak between the mid-1950s and the 1960s.³⁹ They might have preferred to come home in the night for fear of talk of witchcraft. It could be that they were afraid to end up as victims of witchcraft or to be accused of it. Their dress styles and goods they brought home made them vulnerable to such accusations. Another possible reason was that these returnees brought back modern things like soap, rice, matches, modern cosmetic lotions which had to be limited to the intimate family circle of aunts, uncles, sisters and brothers. It was these people who would be the first to accuse the returnees of baleful influences. They were thus appeased by making them resemble *kfaang* people. The returnees were coming from the cosmopolitan spaces, cities and plantations and may have heard of the stories circulated in the villages about them. Also, by arriving during the night migrants could have learnt at first hand before day break of possible dangers awaiting them.

Migrants returning from the Coast thus were popularly known in Kom as people of newness, *iwul kfaangn*, pl. *Igheli kfaang*. Elsewhere, as in Mali, people with similar mobility experiences constituted what Meillasoux has called 'been to's'. A 'been to' came to mean a person who lived outside Mali, and according to Meillasoux (1971: 130-142) young Malians of the literate class adopted the same respectful attitude towards fellow Africans who had lived and studied in France, especially Paris. How-

³⁶ Interview with Prince Henry Mbain, Buea Archives, Buea, 18 January 2008.

³⁷ Interview with Ngeh, Nkambe, 14 June 2008,

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ See CDC Annual Reports between 1955 and 1966 (NAB).

ever, the *salt wata* stories suggest that the stories were spread by people some who had only heard them, and some who had actually been to the Coast. Overall, these stories caused onlookers to regard returnees with esteem and awe. The returnees on the other hand were conscious of their importance and some took advantage of this to elope with men's wives and daughters, who were anxious to see the origin of *kfaang* for themselves. Despite these differences the coastal migrants in their respective villages did not in anyway develop different settlement quarters. Instead, the 'Coasters' integrated themselves in Kom society. The *kfaang* men rather displayed change in their dressing, talking and the way their houses were constructed of zinc and sometimes, stone.

Peter Waindim lived the saga of the journey to the Coast and his experiences were shared in his testimony. His case and his background are relevant because he is typical in his encounter with newness. He is also important because through him we could ascertain how many people migrated to the coast at what point in time. He was born in 1908 and started life as a petty trader buying clay pots and groundnuts from Babungo, a neighbouring chiefdom, and selling them in Belo. His first long distance journey was to Port Harcourt in Nigeria. He also went to Adeima to sell potatoes. He then went to Kombone, Kumba where he experimented with rice farming. He saved some money and used it to buy goats and sold them in Nigeria. He then bought second-hand clothes from Calabar to sell in Tiko and Kumba. Eventually he abandoned the second-hand clothes business and started buying new clothes from Onitsha and Abba in Nigeria. Unsatisfied by this venture he started a kola nut business, buying kola nuts in Kom and selling them at Yola. After the Second World War, in 1949 to be precise, he came back home to Belo and opened a store where he retailed zinc, salt and nails bought from Nkongssamba long before the UAC came to Kom.

I left Kom with my friends, Ndifoyin Awoh and Ngang Chea. Malawa Fuka, Megne, Milibia, Yola Ntu and many others. It took us two days to reach Kubou's compound in Old Town, Bamenda. From Bamenda it took fifteen days to reach Bitoria (sic). We slept at Woyang in Bali; at Bamakwa Sabi and crossed Tang Sabi and spent the night at Fontem junction. From there we stayed at Ngut; Konye. And Kumba. From Kumba we stayed at Mbanga Bakundu; Muyuka; Ekona Benge. From Ekona Benge we passed through Molyko and stayed at Bolifamba. Very early we took off from Bolifamba to Bitoria (Victoria) where I saw the steamer carrying bananas and a plain of water. Victoria was the place which I saw wonders. The steamer was having constant smoke coming out from its head and only steaming. The day it was to go, it made a very large sound which you could hear very far from where it was. The whole sky was dark with smoke. From below the sound was different *ahaang ahaang ahaang ahaang*. This meant that its roots that were deep down were already coming up ready to move. When it was to take off finally, I heard a bass sound *hoooooooooooooug; hoooooooooooooumg; hooooooooooooouung*. At that moment the smoke became thicker and the sky darker while the sea was divided into two parts. It now took off for another world. In fact I wonder aloud and asked myself who on earth could have made such a big thing which could carry all the people from Kom. It was a big surprise to me and looked too big for me. I asked how people get into it. My friends who were already in Bitoria before me, showed how people entered it.

The sea was another surprise to me. The water was salty and so I believed the *salt wata* stories that we used to hear. I asked myself several questions. How a river in a plain could be making noise. We went down to Bictoria in the evening around 4 p.m. and by the time we were just arriving, I heard a loud sound *booo-boooo-boooooo-bboo*. I continued going down with my friends and by the time we finally came out of the forest and looked down I saw wonders. It was quite fresh and a cold wind blew now. I told my other friends that something was going to happen. As we put down our luggage we immediately rushed to the shores of the sea. We stood at the shore and a very dangerous one came now. Water came right up to where we stood and we went running backwards. Canoes too were coming with fish and the people were only dressed in pants. As we were trying to escape for our dear lives one person in the canoe called us to come. We rushed down in great fear and he gave us fresh fish and told us that they have given it because we had helped them in pulling the canoes. At the end of the day we came home with so much fish. The following morning we went back to the shores and

discovered that the sea had moved away depositing fish at the shores which we were picking. I was there at the Coast for eleven months and in December I finally came home and built my house and got married to my first wife.⁴⁰

Many of us were in our group. More than 35 as I can remember. There were porters and traders. Some wanted to work in the plantations and finally some got farmland and remain. The journey actually started at Belo but many other people came from Fundong, Anjin and Muloin and we assembled here before starting the journey.

Our informant provides us with a clue as to how many people actually left Kom at any one time for the Coast. From his story as many as 35 people at a time travelled down to the Coast with divergent ambitions. Some were traders while some were job seekers. We are also informed that not everybody returned home because some acquired farmland and became farmers. This class of people were those who started Kom settlements around the plantations. These areas like Bai-Bikom and Bamugkom are not exclusively made up of the Kom population. But they are dominated by Kom people. Although we are not sure from our informant how many people remained it is evident that those who remained kept close contacts with home. Gradually, they began to participate in home developmental associations.

The experience of our informant with the sea is worth paying attention to. Arriving at Victoria in the evening there is usually a period of high tide. That was a surprise to our informant who has never seen 'a plain of water'. His experiences continue as he informs us about the noise of the waves '*booo-booooo-booooooo-booo*'. That refers to the noisy high tide waves. The story, as it appears from our informant suggests that the waves were very dangerous. In the middle of the sea stood a steamer and people were loading it with bananas.

Indeed, *salt wata* stories become more revealing metaphors. The stories as we have gathered from Peter bring to light the sensations and fascinations of an encounter. Moving salt water brought not only fish but very big sea water vessels with new cargo which workers spent most of the day unloading. Most of those who did the work were from the Bamenda Grasslands where no sea was to be seen (2001). The waves showed that sea water also journeyed. In the morning the waves were usually low and in the evenings during high tides the waves came back depositing fish. The fish represent a metaphor – just as the people had migrated to the Coast and would take home *kfaang* which represents the 'fish'.

After toiling for months and years the people came home with very changed habits. Their language, dress and mode of speaking reflected *kfaang*, just as today many Grasslanders from the United States, Europe, Japan and China talk like European and Asian people. They wear long leather boots and cow boy hats, ear rings and even talk to their parents through interpreters; showing off that they have reached the depths of newness. They also come home with stories about the fascinations and sensations of Europe, America and Asia. These stories include obtaining money from machines and slotting in coins for coffee or food, and many fanciful things like luxurious Porsche cars that are available and cheaper to buy there. Both the people who had been to the Coast and to Europe and beyond constitute hierarchies in that they are more 'endowed with modern opportunities and opportunism than the others' (Nyamnjoh, 2005: 267). We cannot lose sight of the fact that these people, whether in the distant past or recently, re-constituted identities of their own.

⁴⁰ Interview Peter Waindim alias Batacoss, Belo, 27, 28 and 29 September 2008. Also 23, 25 and 26 November 2008.

Going to the Coast was not only limited to the men folk. Women also went. But the difference lay in the fact that most of these women who went down to the Coast did follow their husbands. In this case, it was husbands who determined their mobility. One interesting case, an exception to this rule, was Fuam *kfaang*.

According to people who knew Monica Bih Nange wain Fuam, alias Fuam *kfaang*, was a very daring woman who always believed that whatever a man could do she could do also. She was born in 1935. She never went to school nor did she marry. She violated the norms of Kom society which were not really favourable to the idea of women moving on in their own right. Traditional Kom society viewed a woman as best taking care of the house and the children and also cultivating crops. Fuam is an exception to the rule.

Fuam left Njinikom in 1955 and went to Victoria - a household name at the time in Kom because many *kfaang* people came from there. In 1956 she was employed by CDC at Mabetta palms to work with the maintenance team. After working there for ten years she retired to Kom (1960) after saving some money. While in Kom, Fuam then embarked on the construction of her house with stones. It was a surprise to everybody in Kom - both men and women - that a woman had gone to the Coast and even more that she constructed a house with stone material. What has remained a question which nobody has answered is who the person was who travelled with Fuam to the Coast. When she returned home she was 'new' in her dress and speech, so much so that she was nicknamed 'Fuam *kfaang*'. This simply meant 'Fuam of newness'.

Fuam *kfaang* was the first woman who wore 'modern' dresses in Njinikom and sold beer and 'snuff'. She also acquired land and built a stone house. Fuam advised women when they did not 'dress well'.⁴¹ The local notion that female migrants only had prostitution in mind appears to have been more a figment of imagination than true in most cases (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997: 73-85). Fuam's case has not revealed to us that she was a prostitute.

As the wonders of the Coast were disseminated in market places, kitchens, social gatherings and more recently in drinking parlours, many other people were motivated to go and see these areas. Accounts by travellers have been the root cause of propelling geographical mobility. The first Europeans who came to Africa and returned with stories of the Dark Continent led many other Europeans to visit Africa. Those stories paved the way for European governments to sponsor anthropologists to study African societies.

The photos below reflect some of the personal impact on Kom people that life at the coast induced.

⁴¹ Interview with Francis Kitu Nkwain, Njinikom, 12 January 2009.



Photo 8.7 Young men displaying *kfaang* both in sitting style, clothes and materiality
 Source: Fulson's album



Photo 8.8 A *kfaang* man displaying his *ilung-i-kfaang* radio
 Source: Fulson's Album

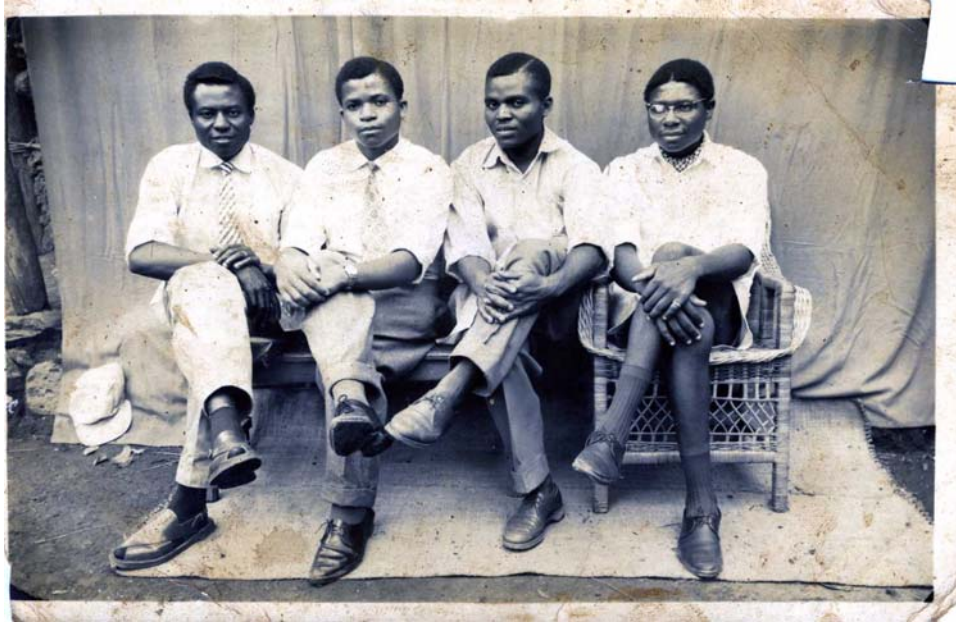


Photo 8.9 *Kfaang* youths with new postures while seated, and their new hair styles too



Photo 8.10 Two women of *kfaang* display their *kfaangness*



Photo 8.11 New ways of exhibiting *kfaang*

The Kom-Yola connection

A round trip from Kom to Yola and back took 62 days or approximately two months. In the course of the journey people played specific functions in the caravan. An average caravan was made up of twenty-five to thirty people and included at least twelve boys and sixteen carriers.⁴² The boys carried food items, mostly corn flour, firewood and pots. The carriers only carried kola nuts, sometimes as many as five hundred. For security during the journey, the most robust persons carried two spears and two poisonous knives.⁴³

The most important commodity traded in Yola was kola nuts. The traders returned to Kom with potassium, onions, matches, towels and beads. One of the people who actively participated in the kola nut business to Yola was Daniel Ayeah Ntu, alias Bobe Yola. He was born around 1910 and became a petty trader buying clay pots at Babungo and selling them in Kom. His first long journey outside Kom was in 1935 when he carried kola nuts to Yola. He consistently went to Yola for the next five years. According to Daniel:

I (he) was one of the first people to sell kolanuts in Yola and that is why I am popularly known as Bobe Yola. It took one month to reach Yola in those days. While at Yola I bought potassium carbonate which was produced at Borno, dadawa and onion which was a spice used in cooking. I also bought clothes which were very expensive. I accompanied Thomas Yai. Whenever we arrived in Yola the Hausas were very happy because, much kolanuts was given to them for free. They took the kolanuts, resold it and bought food which was prepared and kept for more people who came. The Hausa who accommodated us guaranteed our security. I was known by the Hausa chief in Yola. They Hausas also made a lot of gain from the kolanuts that were sold in their compounds. To every 100

⁴² Interview with Danial Ayeah Ntu, Belo, Kom, 23 November 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

kolanuts that were counted 5 was for the host. This meant that by the time that the marketing of kolanuts was through the host had at least 500 kolanuts. The journey itself was very difficult as one person had to carry 500 kolanuts. There were young boys whom we went begging from their parents and their job was to carry food and cook while we were on the way. At one time we were more than thirty. At another time we were 50.⁴⁴

Ntu became successful in the kola nut business with Yola and brought back spices to Kom. These spices included onions (*filum fii kfaang*), potassium (*kaangwa kfaang*), and dadawa (*njou kfaang*). The kola nut trade played a very important role in the geographical mobility of Kom people while introducing *kfaang* commodities. Ntu informs us that at one time they were thirty in number and at another they were fifty. That gives us a rough estimate of how many traders were on the way to Yola at any one time. Various studies have been carried out in West Africa by Lovejoy (1980), Cohen (1966), Lynn (1997), Brook (1980), Brook Jr. (1981) and Hogendorn (1976), on the kola nut trade. These scholars have shown how the trade introduced many foreign goods to the area, such as onions, whisky and different clothing. The case of Kom was just one example of an ongoing trade that has been widely recorded elsewhere in West African history.

Ntu saved money through trading, and in the 1940s he became one of the leading traders in second-hand clothes in Kom. He started in Onitsha where he bought second-hand clothes, *dzisi kfaang*, in greater and greater quantities. The old clothing was first brought to Kom by the missionaries in the 1930s mainly for the catechumens who attended morning mass. He claimed that he earned about 100 pounds per annum. For the five years which he was involved in this kind of trading, he must have made at least 500 pounds. With that money, Ntu was able to finance his children and nephews in school. More importantly, he was one of those who introduced the new clothes to Kom in greater quantities. Yet Kom understanding of *kfaang* had a wider meaning than just clothes or similar items.

Depth and durability of *kfaang*

The encounters which Kom people with distant places like Bamenda, the Coast, Nkongsamba and Yola suggest to us how deep and durable *kfaang* came to be in Kom. For instance, a metal bucket (*Ntòyn-Kfaang*) was a striking example. Before the encounter with the Coast and diasporic places, Kom utilised buckets (*ntoyn*) made of clay which were easily damaged. But with the introduction of buckets made of metal, Kom adopted a new term by calling them *ntoyn kfaang* (bucket of newness). Other items made of new materials provoked a similar response. Spoons commonly known before then as *antass* became *antass-a-kfaang*; soap passed from *a-zsu* to *a-zsu Kfaang*; clothing commonly known as *ndzisi* was termed *ndzisi Kfaang*; matches previously called *a-gwel* became known as *a-gwel-a Kfaang*.

The proximity to the major markets in Nigeria also played a role in the societal transformation of Kom. Much of the new material culture that included clothing (*ndzisi Kfaang*) entered Kom via the traders who went to Yola and Onitsha. After the Second World War, former soldiers became deeply involved in the trade and the importation of second-hand clothes to Kom became their principal activity. The introduction of spices (*ghu fou Kfaang*) and towels (*Bathali*) also came through Nigeria. Interestingly, many

⁴⁴ Ibid., interview, 24 and 25 November 2008.

Kom people involved with the trade with Nigeria adopted nicknames associated with Nigeria. Thus, it became fashionable for someone to be known as Bobe Yola or Bobe Batacoss, reflecting town names such as Port Harcourt, Takum and Kano.

Geographical mobility, together with other factors, gave rise to a new culture among the Kom: the culture of *Kfaang* or newness, and progress. Geschiere (1995: 15) has pointed out that ‘every society might appear to be going for modern technology and modern goods meant for consumption but these societies bring along with them specific cultural traits (...)’ New commodities and their consumption generate new patterns of cultural adaptation, just as *kfaang* was an expression of wide-ranging change on several levels among the Kom. Rowlands (1996), Ardener (1996), Warnier (1993), Geschiere (1997), Nyamnjoh (2005) and Fuh (2009) have argued that the Bamenda Grasslanders, like many other Cameroonians, take quickly to modern conveniences or modern forms of consumerism. These writers have documented the appetite and adaptability among the Bamenda Grasslanders that has gone hand-in-hand with the importation of technological novelties and artefacts. Imported commodities translate into symbols of status and thus enhance the prestige of the holder. There is no doubt that Kom people as a result of their geographical mobility and experiences through trade and migration created new cultural and behavioural patterns encapsulated in the very concept of *Kfaang*, and anchored them in Kom.



Photo 8.12 The photo of a young Kom man in Victoria in 1957. The coat that he wore was known as ‘Tuxedo’ while his shoes were known as 2:10, meaning 2 pounds 10 shillings. This was a fashionable dress to show his *kfaang*-ness.

Source: Fulson’s album

The transformations implicit in *Kfaang* have had both positive and negative impacts. Those who had taken this path with the most success, entailing the acquisition of large, well furnished houses with leather chairs, big TVs, chimneys, tile floors, dining tables, indoor plumbing and other modern conveniences, lost something of value in the old Kom heritage. They no longer lived in tightly integrated communities where neighbours were a source of succour and emotional stability. Their children grew up, and some left for Europe or America. To these set of people, *kfaang* was not the kind of progress treasured among their peers. Taken to its logical extreme, *kfaang* could be a source of alienation.⁴⁵

Yet, those who were initially co-opted into the *kfaang* ways and imbibed the *kfaang* ethos did so only within limits. They did not become like the Europeans who claimed to epitomize *kfaang*. Okot p'Bitek (1968: 53 in the *Song of Lawino*) captured that situation in the following words: 'Ostrich plumes differ from chicken feathers; a monkey's tail is different from that of the giraffe; The crocodile's skin is not like the guinea fowl's (...).' These words point to the danger of giving oneself over completely to the fruitless pursuit of that which is not authentic, to the hazards of attempting to straddle two worlds. Nyamnjoh vey recently, although not specifically considering the point, has captured it indirectly in a very perceptive way.

Drawing from Mamdani on the subject and citizen discourse, Nyamnjoh (2010: 10) holds that 'both straddle cultural and civic citizenships, but who would not accept sacrificing either permanently? Sometimes they are more the one than the other and sometimes more the other than the one, but certainly not reducible to either'. In the context of *kfaang* and 'Komness', the symbiotic relationship could be unstable if not contained within limits. Often a *kfaang* person lacked completeness, and wavered by mediating himself between *kfaang* and 'Komness'. Which one was stronger and did a *kfaang* man feel that he had been defeated in his Komness? Depelchin (2005: 19) argues that 'even in defeat there is a place, there are people, there is a culture, there is a core which never fell apart and to which it is always possible to go back in order to recover (...)'. That explains perhaps why Benedicta and many others who had imbibed *kfaang* returned to their beginnings in Kom. Those who found themselves permanently in diasporic places might work hard to maintain 'Komness'.

Conclusion

This Chapter has attempted to trace the processes through which *kfaang* seemingly came to stay in Kom. The Chapter also reminds us of the extent to which similar social phenomena entailing not altogether different effects can be found elsewhere on the African continent in recent times. Rural-urban migration in Africa and specifically in our region of interest has been studied by scholars like Gugler (1961), Gugler & Geschiere (1998: 309-319), and more recently Nyamnjoh (2009). These scholars have studied in detail the extent to which migrating Africans remained in touch with their villages. In like manner this Chapter has tried to demonstrate how Kom people outside Kom itself, in Bamenda and elsewhere for example, maintained their cultural heritage while residing with friends and kin from home. One significant factor was the effort

⁴⁵ During the fieldwork my observation showed that these type of people were often found alone in their 'castles' only with their closest agnates. Several visits suggested that neighbours hardly ever strolled over to such houses for a chat.

made by traditional authorities, such as the Fon of Kom, to retain and augment the ties that bound the people from Kom to their previous homes.

Such an analysis is quite inadequate, however, if it does not simultaneously consider in detail the great transformations wrought by mobility, interchange and the pervasive influence of 'newness, *kfaang* in the language of Kom, on the agrarian societies of the Bamenda Grasslands. Many of the population of Kom travelled far and wide beyond the boundaries of old. In their interaction with distant geographical spaces such as Nkongsamba, Bamenda, the Coastal Cameroons and Nigeria, Kom were reshaping and redefining the mental maps with which they had set out. Much of what they returned with represented newness or *kfaang* in Kom.

Denis Brown (2006) has recently observed in Caribbean society that returned migrants have re-concocted the socio-economic face of the region. Similar remarks are applicable to the recent social history of Kom. The people of Kom were not unique in their mobility and adaptability. Yet returning expatriates to Kom had also undergone change. Their difference was shown in their identity and the materiality of *kfaang* which accompanied their geographical mobility. Thus, of crucial importance has been the puzzling issue which surrounds the identity of 'Komness'. In the production of place and space especially, Kom people worked hard to maintain their identity, but inevitably underwent their own transformation. Identity as in the case of Kom people demonstrates that it cannot be packaged and folded into one piece, containing both culture and living individual. As deeply rooted as it often was, Kom identity often appears to be fluid and imagined. One group which exemplified this ambivalence was the long-distance traders. Another such can be found in the life histories of those to whom schooling was a transforming process. Both groups ended up as bringers of *kfaang* to Kom. The next chapter presents some of the general conclusions regarding Kom identity in progress.

Conclusion: Kom identity, a work in progress

This thesis is about spatial and social mobility amongst Kom of the Bamenda Grassfields of Cameroon, about *kfaang* and its technologies and how these interrelated and impacted on Kom and 'Komness'. Taking its point of departure from discussions with Benedicta and other informants mentioned at the beginning of the work, *kfaang* is seen as concept which binds together the chapters of the thesis. *Kfaang* consists of 'technologies' that come from far 'outside', as well as those emanating from the 'distant local.' 'Distant local' refers to the localities of most import for those Kom people venturing outside of the kingdom, and from where many new things came. Such places included Bamenda, the Coastal region of Cameroon, Nkongsamba, and Nigeria itself. These things – commodities, institutions, ideas, and so on – were deeply related to social change in Kom. Mobility was part of that transformation which turned Kom into what scholars describe today as a transnational or trans-local community. Kom geographical mobility is one with a very long history which has enveloped Kom within what can be described as a 'mobile culture' or 'travelling culture'. I have tried to examine the intense relationship of the layers of mobility to newness and technologies. The thesis has tried to show the interrelation between technology and geographical and social mobility. It has also traced the way that this interrelationship has led to social change. Both change and continuity characterise social hierarchies within the Kom indigenous group. A cultural dynamic, here termed 'Komness', has integrated the transformations with the pre-existing order.

Although I tried to define 'Komness' in Chapter One, it is still important to recapitulate it here for the purpose of emphasis. As I gathered from Benedicta, Anyway and other informants, 'Komness' connotes the 'core culture' of Kom. It is Kom identity – that element which the Kom people hold onto, even when they are in distant places. 'Komness' comprises a complex which includes language, food, traditional dress and festivals. The eight chapters of this thesis come to the following conclusions.

The relationship between technology, society and social hierarchies

This thesis emphasises that Kom identity has been and remains a work in progress, owing to geographical mobility and the ability of individuals and communities to negotiate and navigate various encounters with differences during and after colonial times. The introduction of various technologies in Kom between 1928 and 1998 such as

much improved roads, motor vehicles, and schools, inevitably brought in their train significant social, economic and cultural changes. The technologies were accepted, translated and adapted by Kom people. But in their appropriation of the various technologies, Kom also held on to their core culture, Komness.

Social hierarchies were either created or reinforced. For instance, during the road construction which was discussed in Chapter Four, the Fon and his traditional authority actively helped in supplying the labour. The road helped to accelerate the geographical mobility of the Kom people. The motor vehicles, ownership of which first occurred among the Kom in 1955, produced new social categories like drivers, motor boys, charterers and vehicle owners. The school and the church were very instrumental in the creation of various hierarchies which arose during this period in Kom. The church was responsible for the birth of new hierarchies like the catechists, mission boys, mission girls and the geographical/social mobility of people. In like manner, the school produced pupils and teachers with widened intellectual horizons. The teachers became geographically and socially very mobile. They were the letter writers and the educators in Kom societies. The overall impact of these technologies on Kom helped in its transformation.

Using primary and secondary sources, the thesis has traced the history of Kom from its colonial setting to post-independent Cameroon by following the way technologies influenced and shaped the geographical and social mobility. As new technologies of social and physical mobility; they have influenced and in turn been influenced by local people. Kom experiences and encounters with others, had informed Kom *kfaang* or newness, as a process of actively modernising traditions and traditionalising the influences of others on Kom society. Kom movements into Bamenda and more distant spaces showed that their local and global encounters kept enriching what they called *kfaang*. Their cultural identity had to be constantly negotiated and navigated. As I discussed in Chapter One, *kfaang* was not imposed on Kom, that the notion of *kfaang* came to mean not only newness but that which was translated and accepted. Kom people interpreted and appropriated it. Due to local and global encounters informed by Kom people's geographical and social mobility that navigated and re-navigated; negotiated and re-negotiated, *kfaang* became firmly rooted in Kom. It is also the case that *kfaang* was partly introduced by the missionary and colonial administration which Kom did not only receive because it denoted progress and forward-looking perspectives, but because these technologies were relevant to their social context. Therefore, I have contended here that for *kfaang* to make any sense in the society it must be relevant to the people and their social milieu. There must as well be a certain degree of geographical mobility. This comes out quite clearly in the thesis. Kom people contextualised newness, domesticated some and made it relevant before they appropriated it. As we have tried to demonstrate throughout the work, the Kom people attempted to domesticate various technologies by giving them various names. Thus the road became 'road of newness'; the vehicle became *afuem-a-kfaang*, 'the carpenter bee of newness' because of its sound, to name only a couple. This logically led to the conclusion that Kom people never completely gave up their traditional ways to dream of newness, rather the outcome was a blend of both.

Kfaang and its purveyors

Closely related to *kfaang* were its purveyors, innovators and entrepreneurial people in the Kom society. These are people who were the cultural conduits of *kfaang*. They included teachers, catechists, mission boys, mission girls and Christians who appropriated various types of *kfaang*. These people were models, who represented the modern Kom person as a result of the new ideas introduced to Kom. This meant that ideas travelled. Such people were partly severed from their roots in the old Kom system. They were on their way to becoming urbanites, and experienced the transition from rural to urban life. It is also evident from the work, especially from Chapters Six and Seven, that these sets of people became new social hierarchies in many ways. They were baptised with water which was called the holy water, received first Holy Communion which was the body of Christ, received confirmation, a baptism by the Holy Spirit and became ambassadors of Christ. Others married with oaths taken before a crowd to bind the couple together in riches, poverty, sickness and health till death did them part. They adopted new names like Janarius, Peter, Paul, Joseph, Mary, Susan, Mary Paula and Francis. Some became Rev. Sisters and Rev. Fathers with prefixes to their names, such as the Rev. Fr. Peter Ndong Nyangie. These local heroes and heroines had been by any stretch of imagination transformed. These were people who became *kfaang* themselves or were considered as such by others within the Kom society. From the story of Benedicta and other informants it seems apparent that she was regarded as an embodiment of *kfaang*, owing to her appropriation of technologies like the school and the church. She became very mobile. But once back in Kom, it appears that some felt she had gone too far with *kfaang*, resulting in a degree of estrangement from her peers. They themselves had held onto their 'Komness'.

From this experience and other evidence from fieldwork, I concluded that no matter how deeply someone had embraced *kfaang*, it was important that his or her 'Komness' was maintained. *Kfaang*, no matter how it was imbibed, had its limitations. No-one, not even Benedicta, should be totally a *kfaang* person and in the process give up his or her 'Komness'. In trying to come to terms in Chapter One with the role of *kfaang* in social transformation, we encountered Benedicta Neng Young. Sometimes naming can be taken for granted but not in this work. Although her new name for most purposes was Benedicta, her traditional Kom names had remained intact. Now she was speaking to me in Kom.

In the work we also examined the existence of Kom cultural practices outside the kingdom, taking Bamenda as a case study. Here we saw the persistence of the former mores surrounding conviviality, as at Kubou's compound. It would seem that there is room for *kfaang* and room for tradition, and that they both must persist for mutual growth, tradition and *kfaang*.

The urge to maintain 'Komness' has been another theme of this work. In Chapter Two, Kom was defined as a culturally bound geographical entity which was constructed in the second half of the 19th century. Upon that historical basis it appeared that Kom cultural identity was largely based. Informants told how they had moved, domesticated and 'Komified' distant places, as well as themselves. They had tried to construct 'Komness' in faraway places with a focus on place, space and belonging. The research here was combined with ethnography and readings generally on identity. The culmination of that exercise was reached in Chapter Eight where I laboured to show the persistence of 'Komness' despite in some cases superficial changes.

Technologies and identity construction

It has been concluded that although these changes are numerous, especially for Kom – the coming of the church and the school, as well as modes of mobility such as the motor vehicle, and new roads – people from Kom had integrated these into their way of thinking and accepted, translated, interpreted and appropriated them in what they called *kfaang*. While on the surface it seemed that society, mentalities, and people themselves, had radically changed, a closer examination suggested that the changes were not so profound with regard to their identity, ‘Komness’.

Innovations of course have become an important part of the construction of identities, themselves, by way of differences among the technologies. Each technology introduced into Kom led to a differentiation of identity around it. For instance, it seemed to me that those who appropriated the technology of the school and the church emerged with different identities as opposed to those who had not done so. Thus, there were teachers, pupils, Christians, mission boys and girls. Thus also there was a difference in identity for women, men, young and old people. Of special interest is the role of the youth as a driving force in geographical, social, and technological mobility. In the thesis I have tried to indicate that the active population which moved out of Kom to the Coast, to the plantations, or became converted to Christianity, comprised much of the time of the younger people in Kom. The case of the church is quite relevant and must not be taken here as something unusual. Elsewhere in Africa studies have shown that those who appropriated the missions were mostly the youth. The case of Kom was no exception and echoes a large body of scholarship on the subject. I have also argued that youth participation in the church and school can be explained by the fact that they were those most alienated from the traditional and colonial restructuring of Kom. Second, youth are very swift at grasping and appropriating new technologies. A case in point is the Internet and mobile phones. These new technologies have been quickly appropriated by the youths in many ways, and comprised another mould of identity.

Closely related to the youth identity issue have been women. Women have not been given enough attention in mobility and technological studies in Africa. Benedicta’s story in the beginning of this thesis shows us that women could appropriate technology and become mobile on their own. The case of Benedicta and her school colleagues was followed by that of Juliana, discussed in Chapter Six. Her mobility led to the opening of the credit union in Kom. All these life histories trace the changes in gender roles which accompanied the introduction of technologies in Kom. Women too were a potent force in social change in this society.

Social change and continuity

The work set out to examine how much Kom had changed by the end of 1998. I began this work with the story of Benedicta who had travelled to Nso, Nigeria, London, Ngoundere, Yaoundé, Douala, Buea and Bamenda and finally Njinikom, Kom. Her story was just one of many and was complemented by that of Anyway Ndichia. While some residents of Kom underwent schooling, and engaged with the church, others migrated to areas like the Coast. Various dynamics were at work here. In numerous cases people returned home but resided in different ‘aggregates’ than the ones which

they had left behind on migrating. Some had whole-heartedly embraced *kfaang*, and might experience a degree of estrangement on return.

The life histories derived from my ethnographic fieldwork were invaluable in sketching some of the fine detail of social transformation in Kom. More generally, both the ethnographic and historical research undertaken for this study led to the argument that social transformation in Kom between 1928 and 1998 was inscribed in the social dynamics surrounding the appropriation of technologies and expressed in geographical and social mobility. But the result was not one of simple replacement. For example, the new roads accessible to motor vehicles did not wipe out footpaths that had existed there before. The decline of the Fon's power and of his executive as occasioned by the introduction of Christianity and education by no means completely destroyed their status and authority completely. At least as at 1998, the position of the Fon of Kom remained pivotal for many residents of Kom. It was not the case that complete transformation of Kom, through the introduction of *kfaang* and the mobility of Kom people, had taken place.

But the concept of *kfaang* was important in shaping the Kom society in the way Kom people translated, interpreted and accepted it. In that social context *kfaang* was able to shape the Kom society over time and space. Since Kom people were able to integrate *kfaang* in their midst, they were also able to shape *kfaang*. Shaping *kfaang*, was carried out in the context of the domestication of newness.

'The Kom identity' or just 'Kom identity'?

Another conclusion concerns the discourse on Kom identity. Should one refer to 'the' Kom identity or 'Kom identity' *tout court*? The prefix 'the' before the term Kom identity tends to imply an essentialist perspective on the issue. A small matter perhaps, but it seemed to point towards a larger understanding of issues of controversy among scholars of cultural identities. At the inception of the research as a novice social scientist from Kom, the use of 'the' Kom identity had caused me no anguish. As the work proceeded, it began to seem that the use of 'the' bestowed on identity an image of something frozen in time and space. Many scholars who have worked in Kom and in the Bamenda Grassfields have laboured over the issue, of identity, and their literature is replete with the term 'the Kom identity'. My own final view, as I have contended here, is that Kom identity is an imagined reality which is constructed, contested and fluid, borne out of geographical mobility, which is the feature of all societies. 'The' should therefore be removed from identity studies on Kom as well as in the Bamenda Grassfields because its usage changes the meaning of cultural identity and renders it more difficult for those who are interested in cultural identity studies to understand and grasp its real meaning.

Dynamism of Kom identity

In like manner, the work has also contended that Kom identity is dynamic and can travel: going to places it accompanies people, or people move with it. The work has shown that Kom identity has indeed gone places, since many Kom people migrated to Bamenda, Buea, and other diasporic places. Bamenda itself was taken as the case study combined with observations in Holland, Belgium and Germany. Observations in these areas suggested strongly that although places and mentalities interact with other cultures, identity is by no means effaced. The case study showed that Kom people work

very hard to maintain what they consider to be their cultural identity. They keep up their cultural dance – *njang* – they eat their traditional staple diets, and their Fon constantly visits them to confer distinction on Kom notables.

Chapter Eight examined the place of identity and discussed the construction of Kom identity among Kom people in the diaspora. As people moved into diasporic places, it becomes incumbent on them to feel at home. That home of course was really Kom. The Fon's visits to Bamenda were intended in part to urge Kom people there to 'Komify' their new domicile. That he tried to achieve by installing a 'Fon' there. The 'Fon' in Bamenda was further empowered also to confer honour on other important personalities in Bamenda palace. Beyond Bamenda, the Kom people in other areas like Buea, Tiko, Victoria, Kumba and Mamfe, although not really constituting a cohesive group as in Bamenda, now and then returned to Kom. Here they no doubt felt that they were renewing their 'Komness'. It seemed that at times they were viewed with amusement and perhaps disdain by their kinsmen.

The confluence between history and anthropology

By working on this study it was brought home to the researcher that, as others before him had realised, the confluence between history and social anthropology could be very useful to both historians and social scientists. What had been uppermost in the mind of this researcher had been the aim of writing an informed history of Kom, via several lines of investigation. The technique of participant observation, so central to anthropology as a discipline, resulted in interviews conducted in kitchens, coffee farms and beer parlours. The accepted methodology of the historian took me to various archives around the world – PRO, Mission 21, Buea, Bamenda and Njinikom. Returning to first-hand observation while in Europe, I constantly attended meetings of Kom in Belgium, Germany and Holland. All these reflected the desire to pursue a rigorous ethnography.

Among Kom people there is a saying that 'one hand cannot tie a bundle'. In the case of the present study, that saying can be taken to imply that two people can do with ease what one person will not be able to do satisfactorily. Employing the methodology of one discipline without utilising that of the other would only have narrowed the work and its potential contribution to scholarship. The ethnographic element added through life histories and first-hand observation of change in Kom, helped to enrich the conclusions at which the study has arrived. As others had realised before my own research journey, a combination of history and anthropology was indispensable when studying the kind of topic of concern here. The intersection of these two disciplines led me to results which could not have been obtained in any other way.

The intended contribution of this work

First, the thesis challenges social scientific and historical scholarship that reduces cultural identity to purely essentialist terms. This work contributes to the debate over the nature of cultural identity among the Kom. It concludes that 'Kom identity' is an imagined reality that has been produced socially and politically over time and space.

Second, it has attempted to contribute towards the understanding and usage of an emic approach regarding the concept of modernity. This contested concept can degenerate into an empty catchword among social scientists unless closely interrogated. For

Kom people, 'modernity' came to entail a cross-cultural conviviality which created spaces for global and local encounters to survive. *Kfaang* therefore was not imposed on Kom; Kom accepted some of it and blended it with their values. The hybrid was neither something totally modern or totally traditional. Thus this study is another contribution to the historiography of the Bamenda Grassfields and another way of viewing and understanding modernity, while also attempting to contribute towards writing an emic history of the voiceless.

Third, the study is one of the first on the people of the Bamenda Grassfields which explicitly treats mobility, communication technology and social hierarchies. Of course this does not mean that nothing at all has been undertaken in this regard.

The thesis has tried to contribute towards the writing of social history. Most of the informants constitute those who fall in the lower rungs of the society. They have been generally called the voiceless people. Simply put, it refers to those sets of people who have contributed towards the production of history but who have not received a commensurate reward in historical research and writings. This branch of history has not taken serious root in Cameroon historiography. Most of the informants cited in this volume were people who had never been educated in the western sense and some were contacted in their smoke-filled kitchens or on their coffee farms. In addition, an attempt has been made to trace family histories of these informants.

Finally, the outcome of this work is a blend of social anthropology and ethnography. This reflects my fervent belief that a combination of these disciplines can contribute much to the elucidating of the complexities of social processes in Kom, Cameroon, Africa and elsewhere in the world. Therefore, the study has concluded that the two subjects might draw strength from each other to their mutual advantage.

This study has been an attempted prolegomenon, a preliminary observation and description, and an invitation to a longer journey towards a social history. My wish is that its substantive objectives be checked and expanded. Mobility, both geographical and social, technologies and social hierarchies, the phenomenon of identity in itself, require much more close scrutiny and a comparative approach undertaken by other budding scholars in the Bamenda Grassfields, Cameroon and elsewhere in Africa. As a matter of fact, a comparative study of the role of mobility, technologies and social change in its own right promises to address fundamental issues in a historical-anthropological dimension in other parts of Africa. Further comparative studies appear quite necessary in order that it might be possible to integrate the findings on wider issues of social change. Another such study might echo the finding that migrants continue to practice their culture in diasporic places in the same way. This thesis has already started that journey by describing the interwoven nature of *kfaang*, Kom geographical mobility and social hierarchies, but also of the changes in the thinking and the impact of mobility, both geographical and social, on Kom people.

It is hoped that this study has provided some insights and guidelines to facilitate further interchanges in the future study of social change in Cameroon, Africa and Europe. Whatever way we study it and whatever tools we use, the fundamental and crucial issue in any human society is that change is the only permanent thing.

References

Sources and repositories consulted during the research

List of informants consulted during fieldwork

<i>Name</i>	<i>Year of birth</i>	<i>Geographical location of interview</i>	<i>Added related Information</i>	<i>Mobile itinerary</i>
Aghaah, Julius Njua	1966	Njinikom	Engineer in the Bamenda-Njinikom road in 1993	Bamenda, Nso
Akainda, Simon	1930	Fundong	One of the road surveyors and Headman during the construction of Njinikom-Fundong road in the 1950s	Bamenda, Tiko and Nigeria
Anchang, Godfrey	1950	Atuilah, Njinikom	A retired electrician	Tiko, Kumba, Ndian, Douala, Nkongsamba and Gabon.
Adiansa, helen	c. 1920	Wombong, Kom	An eyewitness to the fleeing royal women and also one of the first women whom the missionaries gave clothes as a sign to convert her to Christianity	Nso and Bamenda
Ayeah, Nsom	1937	Atulah, Njinikom	Nephew to James Nsah who became the first Kom man to buy a vehicle. He was 18 years when the vehicle entered Kom in June 1955	Tiko, Victoria, Nigeria
Ayumchua Anna	1920	Njinikom	One of those who travelled to Bamenda in the 1940s	Baichi, Fujua, Kedjom Keku, Bamenda and Tiko
Bi, Serah	1932	Limbe	The last surviving wife of Sama Ndi.	Yaba, Lagos, Kaduna, Mamfe and Bamenda
Bih, Nayah	1932	Njinikom	She contributed to the road construction by feeding the workers.	Bamenda
Chah, Linus	1945	Njinikom	Retired teacher/ catechist	Ndian, Bamenda, Nso, Mbueni, Fundong, Djottin, Tatum
Cchia, Bartholomew Kiyam	1924	Njinikom	Attended St. Anthony's school Njinikom, from 1938-1945.	Ngwaah, Bafmeng, Wum, Bambui, Muyuka and Victoria
Chia, Emmanuel Nges	1943	Anjin, Kom	University Don	Belo, Bamenda, Mamfe, Yaounde, Paris and United States of America
Chiabi, Joseph	1935	Belo	Retired custom and the first son of Chiabi, a court messenger and Interpreter from 1916-1954.	Bamenda, Bali, Victoria, Lagos, Paris, London, Yaounde and Douala

Chia, Simon	1940	Belo	Agricultural Post Officer	Bamenda, Mamfe, Kumba, Tiko, Victoria
Chiakoukou, Simon Anbuyinda	1940	Belo	Agricultural Assistant, Njinikom	Bamenda, Tiko and Kumba
Chiallo, Isaiah	1934	Fujua Road, Fundong	Native Court Messenger in Njinikom from 1/3/1955-30/6/1974.	Wum, Bamenda, Buea, Bum and Nkambe.
Chiambong, Juliana Ekwi	c. 1908	Atuilah	One of the lone surviving catechumen who trekked from Njinikom to get Baptism in Nso with a wide knowledge of how Kom was transformed.	Nso and Bamenda
Chiatu Marcus	1943	Njinikom	catechists	Bamenda, Nguti, Ngwaa, Tatum
Chitu, Francis	1928	Fuanantui, Kom	Long-distance trader	Yola, Tiko, Victoria, Mabetta and Nkongsamba.
Chitu, Vincent	1922	Wombong	Long distance trader	Takum, Yola, Makurdi, Bamenda, Bali, Tiko, Victoria.
Chiwo, Ignatius	1922	Njinikom	Ex-serviceman Directed to meet him by Leonard Yuh. They fought together.	The Gambia, Egypt, Tripoli, Jerusalem, Lagos and Kaduna
Chongwain, Godfrey Yuh	1919	Wombong	The trading 'boy boy' of Stephen Mukalla	Bamenda, Mamfe, Onitsha, Nkongsamba, Victoria, Onitsha, Takum, Yola and Ibi
Diang, Josephine	1944	Atuilah	A widow of a death teacher.	Mamfe, Buea, Bamenda and Bojongo
Diangha, Leonard	1923	Anyajua, Kom	Ex-serviceman from Nigeria; president of the Kom people in Nigeria and also the president of the Cameroonian community in Nigeria. Directed to meet by Francis Mafain and Patrick Sangtum because they all lived with him in Nigeria together.	Jos, The Gambia, Casablanca, New Dehli, Bangalore, India.
Diyen, Conrad	1992	Wombong-up, Kom	Youngest Informant	Bamenda, Mbanga, Douala and Yaounde
Diyen, Peter	1936	Balikumato, Kom	Retired teacher	Anyajua, Belo, Njinikom, Bambui, Bamenda
Fienjua, Susana	1925	Wombong-Up	Directed to meet by Peter Ngamlah who lived with her in Nigeria	Jos, Kaduna in Nigeria with her husband.
Foinkijem, Henry, Gam	1932	Bochain	Carrier long distance trading boy. Directed me to Vincent Chitu and Joseph Tohmo whom they use to trek together	Makurdi, Takum, Tiko, Victoria, Tabenken
Fuka, Malawa Chongsii	1920	Ashing, Fuli, Kom	One of the pioneer long-distance trader in the Belo area.	Ibi, Takum, Yola, Adamawa, Onitsha.

Fuka, Christopher	1923	Mugoegoes	A mission boy	
Fukuin, Mary	1928	Wombong		Mamfe, Yaounde, Bamenda
Fukuin, Mary Nkwain	1933	Atuilah	The surviving wife of the first kom teacher, Kinyam	Victoria, Bamenda, Wum, Buea
Futela, Graciana Mbang	1945	Wombong		Douala, Bamenda and Buea
Futela, Elizabeth	1929	Wombong	Directed to meet by Helen Kaiki	Bamenda and Tiko
Grace Nambu	1944	Njinikom		Nso, Bamenda, Bojongo
Kiiki, Helen	1910	Wombong Up	The first female teacher in the Native Authority school in Njinikom and also the first interpreter during the women's riots of 1958-1961.	Nso, Mamfe, Kumba Bamenda, Wum, Fundong.
Kemneki, Peter	1908	Anyajua	A short and long distance trader	Babungo, Bamenda, Tiko, Kumba, Mamfe, Yola, Calabar, Ibadan and Onitsha
Kijem, Lucas	1931	Old Town, Bamenda	Retired prison Superintendent and Kom elite living in Old Town Bamenda since the mid 1940s	Bamenda, Buea, Calabar, Lagos, United Kingdom, Swaziland
Kiyam Beatrice alis Madam Nchoji	1944	Futru, Bamenda	Daughter of the first Kom teacher	Victoria, Tiko, Bamenda, Bafmeng, Konene
Komtangi, Mary Muso	1946	Fungom, Kom		Kumba, Wum, Victoria, Buea and Yaounde.
Koukou, Nathalia	c. 1921	Atuilah, Njinikom	One of the people who used the footpath and the motorable too.	Bamenda
Kukwa, Andreas Ngongtum	1929	Sho, Kom	Directed by Leonard Yuh. They use to go trading together.	Wum, Nigeria, Tiko, Buea and Kumba
Kuma, Bernard Komtanti	1932	Isailah Njinikom	The first Post Master at the Postal Agency	Bamenda, Fundong, Yaounde, Wum and Nso.
Loh, Mantry	1930	Buea	Political messenger	Bamenda, Muyuka, Victoria and Buea
Loh, Pius	1924	Fuanantui, Kom	Teacher of Ngamlah Peter in Jos	Ndop, Esu, Bafmen, Sugu, Bauchi, Kaduna-Vom, Mamfe
Mafain, Francis	1959	Fuanantui, Kom	Just came back from Jos after suffering a stroke	Ashing, Bambili, Mamfe, Victoria and Jos
Mbah, Augustine	1939	Isailah, Njinikom	A retired veterinary doctor	Bamenda, Tiko, Victoria, Konene, Bum and Wum
Mbah, Yindo	1924	Atuilah, Njinikom	Long distance trader	Bamenda, Yola, Tiko, Victoria
Mbain, Henry	1948	Buea	Archivist and the son of Kom oral historian, His Royal Highness, Fon Jinabo II	Bamenda, Tiko, Victoria and Buea

Mbeng, Johnson	1933	Belo	Knowledgeable about the transformations in Kom and retired supervisor of schools	Bamenda, Kumba and Ndu
Mbeng, Michael	1929	Atenilah, Njinikom	A mobile builder and one of the first people in Njinikom to own a bicycle. I got his photograph from his collection	Abuh, Wum Adeima, Markurdi, Bamenda and Ndop
Mbeng, Peter	1933	Wombong, Kom	An eyewitness to the introduction and cultivation of coffee in Kom	Bamenda, Wum, Ndop, Nkambe, Buea and Victoria
Megne, Isaiah	1922	Anjin, Kom	He was one of the long distance traders. Besides, he was also one of the first beer consumers who travelled to Congo Bar from Anjin to drink beer.	Yola, Tiko, Victoria and Nkongsamba
Membang, Kuo	1931	Fundong	The first batch of girls to attend the St. Anthony school in Njinikom.	Jos, Bamenda, Tiko, Nso, Victoria.
Mukong, Boniface	1949	Bamenda	Retired Plantation worker and the son of the recruiter of labour to the plantations, Freeboy Mukong	Bamenda, Bafoussam, Kumba, Victoria and Ndian.
Munteh,	1950	Bochain	A mid-husband and eye witness to the introduction of the car in Njinikom in 1955. Went to St. Anthony Primary School, Njinikom	Shisong, Nso; Bamenda, Kumba and Bojongo
Musi, Mary	1953	Fuanantui, Kom		Tiko, U.S.A., Holland, Britain and Jos, Nigeria.
Nabuin, Juliana	1929	Bochain, Njinikom	Never went to school and got married in 1948 at Njinikom catholic mission to Francis Chia Nyanya	Mudele, Wum, Mukuru, Befang, uprising.
Nafoyn (Queen mother) Maakom Mambai	1939	Sho, Kom	The current Queen mother of Kom	
Nain, Zita	1945	Njinikom	The daughter of Ekwi Juliana and retired matron of St. Bede's College where she worked for more than thirty years.	Bamenda, Nkongsamba and Loum
Nakeh, Tchecla Neng	1910	Isailah, Njinikom	Eyewitness to the evolution and transformation of Kom especially Njinikom	Ewuwu, Babessi, Babungo, Nso, Juayang and Mujang
Nanain, Robert toсах	1951	Sho, Kom	Pedagogic Inspector of Biology for the Southwest Region. He was the last son of Thaddeus Ngong Kuma Nanain, the man who introduced coffee in Kom	Bambili, Bonadikombo, Limbe, Mamfe, Yaounde and Buea.

Nange, Beatrice	1940	Njinikom	No school attended	Fujua, Bamenda, Tiko, Buea and Nso
Nayou, Catherine Ngeh	c. 1932	Old Town, Bamenda	The surviving wife of Pa Kubou	Anyajua, Bamenda
Nchindo, Zacharia	1940	Aboh, Kom	Beer distributor	Mbanga, Nkongsamba, Loum, Muyuka, Victoria and Tiko
Nchoji, Cosmas	1919	Njinikom	First photographer in Kom	Bamenda, Tiko, Mamfe, Enugu, Ibadan and Lagos
Nchoji, Raphael	1934	Futru, Bamenda	Motor boy in the first passenger lorry. He later became a catechist and primary school teacher. Directed to meet by the younger brother, Bartholomew Nkwain.	Bamenda, Mamfe, Tiko, Bafmeng, Konene and Fundong
Ndoko, Moses Chia	1944	Buea-Town	Retired soldier and remained in Buea	Muyuka, Bamenda, Ngoundere, Yaounde and Buea
Ndong, Lucas	1940	Njinikom	Nephew of the late ex-service man, Augustine Mumukom	
Ndum, Martina	1940	Njinikom	She has never gone to school and has also not gone out of Kom.	
Ngam, Francis chiafukuin	1920	Fundong	Prince of Kom, the son of foyn Ngam. President of Kom Area Cooperative Coffee Ltd and ex-service man in the second world war	Njinikom, Bamenda, Kumba, Tiko, Victoria, Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra-Leone, India, England, Germany, Holland, Malta, Italy, Burma, East Africa, North Africa and Cape Town.
Ngam, John	1932	Itiniifoinbi, Kom	Retired business whose business felt the negative impact of tarring Bamenda-Kom road in 1998	Yola, Bamenda, Nkongsamba and Victoria
Ngamlah, Peter	1933	Retired Teacher	Schooled in Jos, Nigeria	Jos, Yola, Djalingo, Tiko, Ndop and Njinikom
Ngebo, Elizabeth	1932	Mugoegoe, Njinikom	Returnee from Nigeria. Directed to meet by Mrs Kube whom they lived in Nigeria together.	Jos, Kaduna and Lagos
Ngesbinain, Otto	1931	Belo	Road labourer	Bamenda, Mamfe, Calabar.
Ngoh, Boniface	1928	Mungoegoe, Njinikom	Retired recruiter of workers to the Plantations Pamol Du Cameroun and one of the first motor boys to work in the Austin lorry that was bought by a Kom man	Bafmeng, Santa, Kumba, Bakossi and Ndian
Ngohchia, Njuakom Camilla	1943	Muloin, Kom and Bamenda	A mission girl in the catholic mission at Njinikom. Schooled in st.	Victoria, Wum, Kumba, Mamfe and Bamenda

			Marie Gorretti Girl's school, Njinikom	
Ngong, Isaiah	1937	Njinikom	A carpenter	Wum, Bamenda, Nkambe and Nso
Ngong, Francis	1932	Wombong, Njinikom	Cousin to Fuam kfaang and one of the first people to own a bicycle in Kom	Nigeria, Kumba, Tiko, Tombel, Bambui and Ndu
Ngong, Francis alias Tailor Ngong Shake	1931	Wombong, Kom	The first tailor in Kom	Bambui, Kumba, Ndu, Onitsha
Ngong, Stephen	1930	Mungoegoe Njinikom	A porter during the long distance trade.	Wum, Bafmeng, Weh, and Befang
Ngongtum, Janarius	1922	Sho, Kom	The headman of a carrier gang in the 1950s	Wum, Nkongsamba, Tiko, and Yola
Ngwisang, Michael	1935	Isailah, Njinikom	A brother to a notorious letter writer, Ndominang	Bamenda, Tiko and Mabetta.
Njong, Pauline	1933	Atuilah	Classmate of Kuoh Membang.	Bamenda, Wum, Kumba, Victoria, Nso and United States of America.
Njuakom, Marx	1932	Bochain, Njinikom	Road labourer	
Njuakom, Theresia Nange	1933	Njinikom	First batch of girls to go to school in Kom	Shisong, Tabenken, Bambui, Bamenda and United States of America
Ngwei, Jacob	1940	Atuilah, Njinikom	Retired teacher	Nso, Bamenda, Bafut, Nkor and Babanki
Njousang, Michael	1936	Isailah	Retired plantation worker	Kumba, Tiko, Victoria and Bamenda
Nkuo, Primus	1943	Atukoini, Njinikom	Retired Teacher	Tiko, Buea, Bojongo, Esu, Mukuru and Fonfuka
Nkwain, Anthony	1930	Wombong	A long distance trader .Directed by Yola Ntu.	Yola, Takum, Makurdi, Tiko, Bamenda, Mamfe, Victoria and Kumba.
Nkwain, bartholomew	1944	Njinikom	Retired <i>Brasseries du Cameroon</i> . Travelled to the plantations by lorry in the early 1960s.	Bamenda, Kumba, Ndian
Nkwaing Fidelis	1946	Njinikom	One of the carriers of the luggage from outstation	Mamfe, Wum, Bamenda, Bafut and Bafmeng.
Nkwain, Francis Kitu	1938	Wombong, Kom	An eyewitness to Fuam kfaang, the woman who travelled to the coast and brought back kfaang to Kom women peers	
Nkwain, Gabriel	1943	Atuilah, Njinikom	Returnee from Nigeria and currently a barber	Nigeria, Mamfe, Victoria and Yaounde
Nkwain, Ivo	1935	Fuanantui, Kom	A brother to chief Anyway Ndichia Timti	Muyuka Mabetta, Tiko and Victoria.
Nkwain, Thomas	1921	Njinikom	No Schooling and a mission carrier who went with the white missionaries when they	Tiko, Bojongo, Mamfe, Victoria Nkongsamba, Wum, Bafmeng, Nso

			were on trek.	
Nooh, susannah	1920	Fuanantui, Kom	No school attended	Bamenda and Tiko with the husband.
Nsah, Anna Bih	1930	Njinikom	The widow of the person who first bought a car in Kom	Kumba, Tiko and Victoria
Nteinmusi, Dorothy	1940	Njinikom	A mission girl and currently a Rev.Sister	USA, Italy, Nso, Yaounde, Mbetta and Buea.
Ntu, Daniel ayeah alias Bobe Yola	1910	Djichami, Belo	A long distance trader. Directed to meet by his contemporary, Peter Waindung.	Babungo, Yola, Takum, Ibi, Onitsha, Benin, Tiko, Victoria
Nuh, Daniel chindo	1930	Wombong, Kom	Native Court Clerk	Achain, Laikom, Bamenda, Nguti, Mamfe, Victoria, Kumba Ndop, Mankon.
Nuh, Nicolas	1923	Atoini, Fundong	Schooled in St. Patrick's Primary School, Fuanantui and proceeded to St. Anthony's School Njinikom in 1940 but never completed his elementary education. He directed me to meet Vincent Chitu at Wombong whom he grew up seeing as a man who travelled a lot to the coast.	Wum, Kumba, Mabetta
Nyanga, Clara	1934	Njinikom	Knowledgeable about many issues in Kom. Directed me to more women and men who had travelled out of Kom	Bamenda and Bali
Nyanying, Joseph Ndocha	1942	Atuilah, Njinikom	A retired teacher	Anyajua, Njinikom, Achain, Muntang, Ndop, Okoyong, Fontem and Buea
Oku, Freeboy	1923	Acha, Belo	Ex-service soldier.	Bamenda, Victoria, Lagos, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Rome, Malta, India, Burma and Jerusalem
Sangtum, Martina	1945 in Jos Nigeria	Atuilah, Njinikom	Retired teacher	Nigeria, Nso, Yaounde and Bamenda
Sangtum, Patrick	1944	Atuilah, Njinikom	Born in Nigeria and returnee from Nigeria. He lived in Nigeria with Leo Diangha.	Wum, Bamenda, Nkambe and Jos
Tang, Mary Magdalene	1926	Wombong Up	Directed by Elizabeth Ngebo.	Jos, Kaduna and Lagos. We were in Lagos with Nawain Nayah, Abeh, Yuh Nabain, John Yuh
Tang, Susannah	1934	Isailah, Njinikom	Started schooling in St. Anthony's school but dropped out when it was said that girls had to continue in Shisong, Nso.	Bamenda, Yaounde and Ndop
Tasah, Peter alias Bo Nain	1939	Atuilah, Njinikom	Retired teacher and catechist	Anjin, Mbesnaku, Bamenda, Kumba, Bojongo, Fuanantui

Theodosia Nayah Chiambong	1935	Mughef, Kom	The first mid wife in Njinikom hospital	Nso, Wum, Bamenda
Tim, Cammanda	1936	Bamenda	The first mechanic of the first transport vehicle in Kom	Bamenda, Victoria and Kumba
Tim, Jerome Neh	1941	Nkambe		Bafmeng, Bali, Yaounde, Nkambe Bertoua
Tim, Ngong	1935	Fundong	One of the passengers who frequently entered the vehicle in 1955	Tiko, Kumba and Victoria
Timti, Nges	1933	Fundong	Known him from the archives	Bamenda, Muyuka, Kumba, Victoria and Tiko
Titang, Richard	1931	Bamenda Up-Station	Former director of West Cameroon prisons and retired but living in Bamenda. Directed by Neng Mukala.	Bamenda, Victoria, Lagos, Britain and America.
Tobuh, Joseph Chongwain Kuo	1909	Achajua, Wombong	One of the porters of building materials from Nkongsamba. He also became a mission boy	Bamenda, Nkongsamba, Kumba, Mamfe and Tiko
Tosah, Nobert Kuma	1951	Bonduma, Buea	Son of Thadeus Ngong Nanain who introduced coffee in Kom	Bamenda, Victoria, Yaounde and Buea
Toh, Vivian	1965	Harlow, UK		Bamenda, Nkambe, Nigeria, Britain
Tohmukum, Michael Ndzi	1954	Aboh, Kom	The successor of the biggest royal compound in Kom	Foumban, Bamenda, Yaounde, Bafoussam and Victoria
Tubuo, James	1937	Djichami, Kom	Directed to talk with him by Peter Diyen because he was the nephew of the chief recruiter of people to the plantations, Freeboy Mukong.	Ndian, Tiko, Buea and Bamenda
Wainchom, Emanuel Njong	1967	Atuilah, Njinikom	Read general medicines in Italy and returned home to give voluntary services to his people	Bali, Wum, Victoria, Buea, Yaounde and Italy
Waindim, Peter alias Batacoss	1908	Belo, Kom	Long distance trader per excellence	Kumba, Tiko, Bamenda, Port Harcourt, Yola, Takum, Benin and Onitsha.
Yisa, BatholomeW	1930	Itiniifoinbi	An eyewitness to the introduction of the 'prostitution' in Njinikom	Bamenda. Tiko and Mamfe
Yongabi, Elias	1928	Bochain, Njinikom	One of the first teachers of Anway Ndichia's school at Fundong	Nkongsamba, Kumba, Babanki, Bagem, Wum and Nigeria
Yongabi, Francis	1982	Rotterdam		Fundong, Njinikom, Douala, Yaounde, Buea, Paris
Yongabi, Mary	1935	Bochain, Njinikom	Retired teacher	Nso, Kumba, Bambui, Babanki-Tungoh
Young, Benedicta	1937	Isailah, Njinikom	Started schooling in St. Anthony's School, Njinikom	Shisong, Tiko, Ibadan, London Ngoundere,

Njeng			and continued in Shisong.	Yaounde, Douala, Bamenda and Kom.
Yuh, Leonard	1918	Sho, Kom	Ex-service soldier	Kumba, Tiko, The Gambia, Casablanca, Tripoli and Rome.
Yuh, Peter	1919	Atuilah, Njinikom	One of the catechumens responsible for the transportation of building material	Mujang, Bamenda, Victoria, Tiko and Nkongsamba
Yuh, Vincent (His Royal Highness The Fon of Kom)	1920	Laikom, capital of Kom	Mobile trader. He directed me to chindo Megni of Anjin.	Takum, Yola, Ibi, Kumba, Tiko, Victoria.

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 Md/e 1955/1 Nkom Native Court 1935
 Md/e 1956/1 Kom Native Court Area: complaints 1956
 Md/e 1960/1 Kom Native Court Area: complaints 1960
 Mi/b 1954/1 Soil conservation orders and rules made by N.A. Bamenda Division

Oa/d SHA/1 Shaddock, Mr. K. Admin. Officer
 Oa/h 1940/1 Various confidential reports 1940
 Od 1957/1 Petitions and complaints, Wum Division
 Oa/a 1918/6 Interpreters Cameroons Province, Uniforms for
 Oa/6 MUS/1 Messenger Paul Musango, Residents Office correspondence re
 Oa/b KUB/1 Kubo, Interpreter, Bamenda Division Papers about
 Oa/b NGA/3 Ngam Mr. Vincent Ngeh, N.A. Teacher Bamenda Division
 Oa/b NTA/1 Ntam, Mr. Simon Ndichia, Native Administration Teacher, Bamenda Division
 Corresponding concerning
 Of 1931/1 Sama C. Ndi, Mr. Of Bikom

Pa 1960/2 Kamerun Ex-soldiers National Union
 Pc/b 1926/1 Riot at Belo village, Bikom, Bamenda Division 1925

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