



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Kfaang and its technologies : towards a social history of mobility in Kom, Cameroon, 1928-1998

Nkwi, W.G.

Citation

Nkwi, W. G. (2011, May 24). *Kfaang and its technologies : towards a social history of mobility in Kom, Cameroon, 1928-1998*. *African studies collection*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17674>

Version: Corrected Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/17674>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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).



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.