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

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

### Introduction

The introduction of the colonial church in Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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 (...).’<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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 (...).<sup>5</sup>

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

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

<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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 (...).<sup>8</sup>

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.<sup>9</sup> In 1956, the Wum Divisional Authority Soil Conservation Rules were

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

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

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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 Kom<sup>11</sup>. Materials were also transported from Mamfe and Victoria, 250 and 325 kilometres away

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

<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup> 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.<sup>13</sup>



*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

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

<sup>13</sup> 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'.<sup>14</sup> 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

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<sup>14</sup> 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’.<sup>15</sup> 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

<sup>15</sup> File Ba (1922) 1 Report on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons, 30<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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,

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<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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-

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Dorothy Nteinmusi, Njinikom, 20 January 2009; Camilla Ngohchia, Foncha Street, Bamenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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).<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 30<sup>th</sup>, 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

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

<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> 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

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

<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup>

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-

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<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Helen Adiansa, Wombong, Kom 30 September 2008.

<sup>24</sup> *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 (...).<sup>25</sup>

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 (...).<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

### 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

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

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

<sup>27</sup> 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,<sup>28</sup> 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.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> 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.

<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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).<sup>31</sup> 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).<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.

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<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Zita Nain, 20 September 2008, Njinikom.

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

<sup>33</sup> 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.



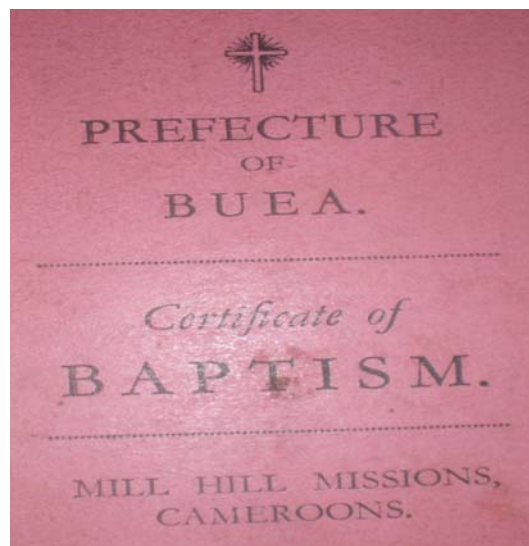
*Photo 6.13* Juliana Chiambong's certificate of recognition as one of the first members of the credit union  
*Source:* Juliana Chiambong's collection



*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.<sup>34</sup>

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

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<sup>34</sup> 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.