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The story of houses in the grassfields: mobility, belonging and hierarchies in urbanising North-West Cameroon

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Figure 1.1: Moh Tanghongho's Compound

Source: Photo by Author



Figure 1.2: A compound with traditional thatched roofs and mud bricks.

Source: Photo by Author

1. General Introduction

Mobility and Material Culture and Processes of Belonging

‘... If you do not have a house in the village, you will find it difficult to long to go back to the village because you do not have where to go and stay comfortably. You feel uncomfortable that people in the village have their houses to stay and you who are working in the city have no house. You have to go and beg to live with them and the standard might not be what you are already used to. When you are working you build in the village so that when you go home, you have where to stay and your family can go there even in your absence. There are certain things you do to show that you are mature in the village. You must possess a house, a wife and you buy a gun. When you have a gun it means you are a man. You can defend yourself, your family and village. Your age group at home, your parents and everyone look at it as a sign of responsibility, that you have a house of yours. (...) It is now that people are building nice houses. The building pattern in those days did not encourage this. ... There is already scarcity of land. The population is increasing and people are more conscious of the importance of land meaning that those who own the land are not ready to part with the land. Before you could, with 50.000 FRS (76 Euros) buy a very big piece of land but today the people know the importance of farmland. With the ring road and the consciousness of the people about the importance of land and the projects that each and every one is thinking of carrying out whether it is construction or whatever thing, it makes it that land becomes really very scarcer than before.’ (E. M. Yoyo, personal communication, March 24, 2011).

1.1 Yoyo’s House

This discussion with Yoyo, a 69 year old man who lived almost all his life outside of Papiakum and did construct a big house in the village, is central to this thesis. His house, as the one in figure 1, is much better than the house he lives in in the city: a complex, structure of wood, masonry, concrete or other material, outfitted with plumbing, electrical, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. This is a big contrast with most houses of the villagers. In this opening citation he refers to the central themes of this thesis. The most important is the way Yoyo defines his being part of the community, where he refers to central cultural values of belonging. He sees the building of a house as a central link to realise his ‘belonging’ to the village and its people in a decent way that also relates to his status as a mobile urbanite. He also refers to the crucial vector today: the scarcity of land. This scarcity increases conflicts over land, and also the difficulties to access land. It also indicates as I will argue in this thesis that also these villages need to undergo a process of urbanisation. The rich urbanites now claim their belonging by showing their power through the construction of houses on the scarce land of the village. What then is the benefit for the village of these investments in the end? Or are these courses of history that cannot be countered? And that in the end turn the village into a space in between the rural and the urban, where the poor villagers become dependent on these rich in/outsideers? This thesis links the processes that we observed in Baaba I, i.e. the construction of huge ‘modern’ houses, to the general phenomenon of mobility in the region, where indeed many young people leave and left to search for ‘greener pastures’, and their (emotional) struggle to ‘belong’, and the wider tendency that this is part of: increasing competition of land and processes of urbanisation. Baaba I is part of the Papiakum, a people who have their own

social and political organisation. As we will see the general processes have their cultural and social specificities that colour the case study.

1.2 Research Problem: The Story of Houses in the Grassfields

In reference to Figures 1.1 and 1.2 and Yoyo's interview, the central problem of this thesis rotates on what these houses tell us about the political and social changes that are going on in Anglophone Cameroon. During the past years in this part of the country, we have seen a steady urbanisation, an increase in hierarchies also in wealth and a steady continuing but increasing migration of people both outside of Cameroon and inside. What do these houses tell us about these changes, and what are the deeper underlying factors that we can read through the houses? These houses are a symbol of these changes and the socio-political stories of the houses, as a 'social life of the object' (Appadurai, 1986) is central to this thesis to tell the story of socio-political change in Anglophone Cameroon.

When I went to the field I was first interested in ascertaining the impact of mobility on the management of natural resources, mainly land. Apart from farming, land, I realised, land is crucial in the building of houses and other infrastructure. The thesis seeks to understand the reasons for such landed investments at home. Home here has dual meaning; a building or domicile, living space used as a permanent or semi-permanent residence for an individual, family, household or several families where you are comfortable or location that a person thinks of as the place where he/she lives and belongs as part of a community as long as your heart is there. This is related then to the feelings of belonging (Nyamnjoh, 2002) to a place.

This thesis questions the relationship between material culture, mobility, access to land and the ways it affects the hierarchies (political, social) that structure social relations in the villages (ethnic communities) of the Grassfields in Cameroon. It tells this story through the story of the houses built by the mobile urbanites; putting at the centre of the thesis the visual system, i.e. the process that results in humans producing visible objects, reflexively constructing their visual environment and communicating by visual means (Murphy and Banks 1997:21).

1.3: Relating the concepts of material culture, mobility, and (r)urbanisation

In this thesis I will be expanding and connecting the salient themes of material culture, access to land, social hierarchy and mobility bringing forth the visual elements using my case study, Papiakum which is also known in this thesis as Baba I. This section focuses on the concepts and their relationship as they are understood in the literature and that I link to studies of the Grassfields. These discussions set the frame for the study of Houses in Baba I.

1.3.1 Material Culture – The Visual System

In this thesis I follow the idea that material objects embody complex intentionalities and mediate social agency. They can be used to both reveal and conceal secret histories. I follow here the study of Marianne Ferme (2001) who looked at the connections between cola nut, cloth, palm oil, clay, houses and hair styles where she found a hidden history of slavery and oppression leaving a mark on gender relations. This also follows Zittoun (2015) who posits that a cultural psychology invites us to examine the cultural elements which mediate human relationships. These, which usually have a material and a semiotic dimension, have both an existence in the present i.e. the here and now of an interaction, and also a more virtual one, opening memories or worlds of possibilities.

The interview of Yoyo at the beginning of this section gives us a glimpse into the materiality of the community but also opens up discussions on the 'ways of seeing' as propounded by Banks and Morphy (1997:21). They argue, 'visual system is the process that result in humans producing visible objects, reflexively constructing their visual environment and communicating by visual means; visual worlds reflect different ways of seeing'. Ways of seeing, therefore refers to how the world is seen by people and how people learn to use the visual systems within a given context.

Objects form the integral part of the social fabric of everyday life. As such persons and objects are said to be in constant dialogue. Hence, 'the absence of material culture makes it virtually impossible for humans to present themselves and to symbolize, achieved and desired statuses. Objects are a cause, a medium, and a consequence of social relationships'(Nuessel 1997:282). Material objects are open to multiple interpretations just as language (immaterial object). There are at least four sources from which meaning of objects could be derived: its 'inherent physical properties; information conveyed by objects which surround an artefact; the observer's life-long experience with same artefacts; and texts about artefacts (museum labels, advertisements, newspaper articles, amongst others). Ultimately, objects are inter-textual because of their multiple significations derived from linguistic statements about them" (Nuessel 1997:282-283).

Nuessel refers to objects and artefacts that Miller (2012) extend to 'stuff' and their relationship with people. All these bring out in very visible terms the tangibility of material culture. Its 'meanings appear to be relatively simple, straightforward, essentially timeless and largely identical for any observer' (Miller, 2012) when placed within a specific cultural context. Therefore people often gloss over stuff rather than get into 'the complexities of deciphering the rich symbolic meanings inherent in or imposed upon objects' (Riggins 1994:2). Appadurai (1986) demonstrated how things have a social life because they are in constant relation with people and context. Baba I will serve as a case study through which the social life of stuff will be elucidated.

I also found the ideas of Grassby (2005) useful for the understanding of material culture among the Papiakum. He states that material life of a people is partly shaped by its cultural imperatives which are structured in a way that has to be perceived and understood. When looking at 'stuff' as such, they cease to be mere things, but rather they have multiple meanings and are culturally and socially interpreted. Contextualisation becomes very crucial as social interactions within specific spaces call for specific/different interpretations.

Focusing on houses and infrastructure that are changing the face of Baba 1 brings to light as Olsen (2003:88) puts it that 'things, objects and landscapes, possess 'real' qualities that affect and shape both our perception of them and our cohabitation with them'. Attempting an understanding into their place and symbol meaning, bringing along the process of change as these have evolved over time will be illuminating an ongoing process experienced within this society. According to Grassby (2005:593), 'visual images and tactile objects help to recapture choses vecues, physical conditions of everyday life and the options for action of different groups. The exteriors and interiors of homes reveal how people met the basic needs of food, shelter and warmth and whether levels of comfort, privacy, personal security, improved'. By following the construction and furnishing activities going on in Baba I, 'a more profound appreciation of things will lead to a more profound appreciation of persons' Miller (2010:6). Through the 'fundamental materiality' of these urbanites, we will come 'to understand, convey and appreciate our humanity' Miller, (2010: 4). Rowlands (1989 &1992) and Nkwi (2011) on their studies in the Western

Grassfields of Cameroon give concrete examples of how consumption of material stuff is appreciated by the people of this region.

By using six case studies from the urban environment of Bamenda, the capital of the North West Region of Cameroon, Rowlands (1989) illustrates how the cultural language of development and progress and its material appropriation in terms of the consumption of the products of Western technologies, has become the ultimate touchstone for confirming and evaluating the nature of personal and group success. These western consumables are displayed in their modern houses which form an integral part of their life histories. This success however is called to question as Rowlands (1992) is concerned with understanding why the Bamenda people do not believe that a person catches success, but that success catches a person. After a description of Bamenda notions of subjects and objects, he concentrates on traditional notions of power and achievement in two Grassfields societies, Nso' and Laga Bum. The study pays attention to the Bum term 'ifinti' and the Nso' term 'sem'. Both notions refer to the capacity to transform, for example into a strong wind or a lion. These, 'strong wind and lion' are not ordinary descriptions given to a person. Certain categories of people are cross examined as they exhibit their material cultures through stuff they have accumulated as they got successful. Nkwi (2011) studied the connection between communication technology and mobility among the Kom between 1928 and 1998. Crucial to Nkwi's thesis and relationship with this thesis is/are the objects in which migrants introduced to Kom in terms of conspicuous consumption like the houses and the motor car. He provides the biography of these objects and the people who acquire it. Godelier (2002) expatiates on this as he tries to understand why there are some things one sells, others one gives, and yet others that can be neither sold nor given, but that must be kept and transmitted. It is clear that the reasons do not reside in the things themselves. The same object may successively be bought as a commodity, circulated in gift exchange, and ultimately hoarded in a clan treasure as a sacred object and, as such, withheld for a time from any form of circulation, market or non-market.

So at each turn, objects should be contextualised for a proper interpretation as they are part of visual systems in which they are found. The materiality of our environment cannot be taken for granted and that is why through the architectural infrastructure, the thesis strives to understand these Baba I urbanites. These houses can be said to be an embodiment of the story of each urban migrant as well as the changes brought in by the social and mental processes orchestrated by the rural urban rural mobility.

1.3.2 Mobility

At the beginning of the introduction Yoyo's reflection called our attention to mobility. Mobility in its myriad forms and ubiquitous nature 'is engrained in the history and daily life experiences of people', (De Bruijn, van Dijk and Foeken, 2001). At face value, the physical mobility/migration is simply the movement of people from one place to another. Human mobility has always been linked to natural resources and material culture that has led to the transformation process of communities. This is an ongoing process in Baba 1 as well as Anglophone Cameroon. When people move, they bring with them their cultural values which influence the way they adapt and adopt to their new environment.

It is interesting to link processes of mobility to also the possibilities to move, either physically or virtually. The studies of De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman (2009), De Bruijn, Angwafo, Nyamnjoh (2010) have brought our attention to the ways ICTs have reshaped the mobility in the grassfields. But then we should also take the earlier transformation, such as the introduction of roads, the car, that have reshaped mobility

patterns (Nkwi 2011). It is important to notice that the grassfield's history is coloured by these periods of technologies of mobility, when they were transferred to work in the coastal plantations, or later working in urban environments and again later were able to move to other continents and far away destinations in Africa (Nyamnjoh H, 2014). In all this we can consider the Grassfields as being 'mobile communities' as of old. De Bruijn (2014) explains this concept of mobile community when she sketches the history of a family from the Grassfields in their mobilities from the 1960s to the present. The essence is that mobile people whatever their mobility is will always be in contact with their kin at home, or elsewhere in the world. Such mobile communities have become more intense with the introduction of ICTs who have diminished space and time, but the working of these social fabrics has been there ever since mobility started. The houses I discuss in this thesis are also to be seen as being part of this construction of mobile communities in Baba I.

Migration is playing an important role in the livelihoods of many African people but also that movement patterns have indeed changed in the last few decades. While links between rural and urban areas and populations tend to remain strong, transformations in economic and non-economic factors underpin the sometimes important variations in the migration decisions of different groups; gender, generation and access to assets are critical in determining who goes, who stays and who returns. Examples abound. For instance, Findley, (1997) shows how migration is causing spatial redistribution which is transforming the lives of families in both rural and urban areas in Africa as migrants strive to maintain ties in their different migrations. Dike (1982) takes two specific examples amongst the Igbo people of Eastern Nigeria to show how urbanites use their connections with the state and private investments to construct private houses and also public infrastructure to ameliorate the living standards of their communities. Barten (2008) talks about the need and dreams of migrants out and in Mali aspiring to construct big mansions at home to stay connected to their roots/families even if they might not live there. These empirical examples are going to guide my quest of understanding the process taking place in Baba I.

Englund (2002) examines how migrants in Chinsapo township of Malawi work hard to construct permanent and better settlements (investing in human and land resources) in their communities rather than in the township where they reside. Returning home for them is a given factor making those with the intent to stay, shy away from making public pronouncements. Tacoli (2001) looks at the increase in urban poverty in the 1980s in most African countries and how likely it must have affected the directions of population movement and subsequent regional and national urbanisation trends. This is thought of to have slowed, sometimes significantly, the growth rates of urban centres. Black, King & Tiemoko (2003) in their study on return migrants to Ghana elucidate how the processes of migration and return have contributed to development and poverty alleviation through the promotion of small businesses. They argue migration and return can be seen as a mechanism for providing capital for the development of small enterprises, particularly among poorer and less-skilled migrants. These studies pave the way also for me to appreciate the Papiakum urbanites from this perspective to assess the impact of their investments at home.

From the above literature I would hold that mobility in its encompassing nature and varied forms is seen as a means through which barriers have been broken and/or erected and access gained into new social fields where people were generally excluded. This has thus opened up fields for new negotiations and re-negotiations within local, national and international socio- political hierarchies in the process of ploughing back profits and in a bid of making the home a better place in concurrence of migration studies across Africa as

indicated by the cases cited above. Mobility has therefore become ‘a vital force for economic development and social change, including job creation – a spur to entrepreneurs and their innovations, to trading and small industries’, as noted in Gavrilova (1971:291).

Nyamnjoh's (2005) study on the mobility of the Grassfielders to the coastal plantations and then to Europe illustrate how mobility has shaped and redefined relations between relatives in the home communities of the Grassfields and those of the Diaspora communities. They, the able-bodied youths, refer to themselves as being in Nyong (a kind of zombification of humanity) abroad where they have to slave away to send remittances back home to relatives and friends claiming their dues. Ndjio (2009) from the High Plateau of the Western Grassfields gives an insight into the importance of the interwoven nature of migration and ‘rootedness’, belonging, and ethnic identity through the architectural transformation of the landscape by les nouveaux riches and or Bushfallers showing how their actions challenge and question the socio-political institutions.

For a vast majority of migrants who came singly to these urban centres leaving behind their families, they tried as much as possible to maintain their ties with those in their areas of origin which Gugler (1971, 1997) describes as spending their lives in a dual system as the home front had to acknowledge their success through the migrants landed and human investments. As a matter of fact this is a mobile community. Smart and Smart (2003: 276) quoting Schiller et al., (1992:1) puts this ‘as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement’. Urban centres became more or less hunting grounds for these urbanites that despite their 'good life' and investments out there, they still aspire to return home for retirement or to be buried. Due to these aspirations, investments were therefore made at the home front in order to make life comfortable when they finally return or when visiting (as pointed out by Yoyo) which had other implications like 'dampening out-migrations'. Rural-Urban connection is not new to scholars who have been working in Africa. Gugler (2002), Englund (2002) and Nyamnjoh (2002) while writing on rural-urban connections contend that migrants will always strive to return home from their hunting expeditions, a place of primary social security.

1.3.3 Bushfalling and Mobility: confronting the discourses

Bushfalling in Cameroon implicitly means migration and this type of migration as found in discourses denotes Cameroonians who have migrated to Europe, America and recently China. However in this thesis I use bushfallers to mean those who have migrated out of the village to the city and not out of the country. The thesis therefore focuses on internal bushfallers. This is relevant as it helps to build the theoretical framework of the study. Migrants who took their hunting expeditions abroad for greener pastures are referred to in Cameroon as Bushfallers. This notion here will open up further discussions on mobility and its repercussion on the home community by the activities of migrants. Bringing home these notions of hunting grounds and social security, Nyamnjoh (2009: 42-43) reiterated by Alpes (2012) and Atekmangoh (2017) points that hunting is a metaphor of choice among Cameroonians. For the mobile amongst them, the city and the ‘world out there’ are perceived as hunting grounds; the home community is the place to return at the end of the day, with a smile on the face or with sadness. Investing in one's home community materially and through relationships is generally seen as the best insurance policy and a sign of ultimate success, for it guarantees survival even when one has lost everything in the city and abroad, and secures and makes manifest an achievement of success through satisfying obligations and fulfilling requests. This quest of bushfalling whether as an individual or

collective initiative and fulfilling family obligations and expectations is elucidated in Atekmangoh (2011 & 2017) showing that remittances to the family at home remains a strong barbwire for these young Bushfallers from Cameroon in staying in touch with their kindred. Thus, although successful urbanites or diasporic Cameroonians may not permanently return or retire to the rural area as such from their hunting grounds, most remain in constant interaction with their home communities in various ways – including active participation in development initiatives, and some leave express instructions with kin to be buried or re-buried in their home communities.

As also shown by Dike, Nkwi and Gugler, this is true of first generation migrants to the city and beyond, as it is of second and third generation migrants, as keeping in touch and relating with the home community is measured more through relationships, attitudes and behaviours over time, than only through physical presence or the short term. This means that individual achievements could be seen as meaningless if not appreciated and endorsed as collective success by the group (Nyamnjoh 2002:115-116). Relationships, attitudes and behaviours are not frozen in time and space, a reality which calls for flexibility and understanding especially in a context of local and global vicissitudes such as economic downturns, globalisation and changing indicators of value.

This migration process actually commenced from farmlands and farmhouses, then people started moving gradually into the first cosmopolitan cities before getting to hear the wonders of the plantations and the sea with large sea going vessels. In most African countries, the coast was the second bush or hunting ground before outward migration due to its colonial history which created urban centres, a process referred to by Gugler and Flanagan (1978) as a colonial syndrome. Bushfaller/Bushfalling is not an entirely new process especially in line with mobility patterns of the different peoples of our mobile world.

This case study brings to question whether most investments in Baba are done by those who are in Europe as the literature on Bushfalling seems to suggest or those in urban areas in Cameroon. Thus this thesis will divert from the conventional understandings of bushfaller to maintain that internal mobility in Cameroon has complex stories and also that this notion of bushfalling as a general idea for the Bamenda grassfields has specific outcomes for the different societies who make their own mobile communities bounded in cultural values and social hierarchies. The study of Gheasi, Nijkamp & Rietveld (2011) posits the common perception that most migrants are moving from poor countries to rich countries, while in reality half of the migrations take place within the developing countries. Gheasi, Nijkamp & Rietveld reflections are going to lead me into a deeper understanding of the process taking place in Baba I. One cause of this growth is the globalization process that enhanced mobility and improved accessibility to different places. The bushfallers being tackled here are not necessarily those who have crossed the Atlantic Ocean or national boundaries but focus will be on those who have left their home communities for bushes in the urban centres or big cities within the country for better economic outcomes or living standards.

1.4 (R)urbanisation

This section is going to focus on how migrants are urbanising the rural areas and ruralising the urban areas. I draw inspiration from Cottyn (2020) who opines that urbanisation is crucial in changing rural landscape in Rwanda. This process is also ongoing in Baba I. This is going to throw more light on the connection between material culture, mobility and landscape transformation. Landscape transformation is simply the change in land use from

agriculture to the construction of 'mega' houses (Ndjio, 2009). Bhandari (2010:2) asserts that 'urbanisation is important from the socio-cultural evolution point of view. A rural setting gradually loses its rural features as they evolve into or are replaced by the urban ones and hence becomes more developed and civilised'. According to Champion (2001:144), urbanisation is viewed as a social process of people adopting the attitudes and behaviour traditionally associated with life in the cities and towns, irrespective of where they might be living'. These views of Bhandari and Champion takes us back to the perspective which Little had started advocating in 1960 but which got sparing attention. However, Little (1974:7) reiterates the point that urbanisation is a social process 'whereby people acquire material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originate in or are distinctive of the city'. According to Little, this social process did not break up but strives to maintain its rural ties later visited by Gugler and Flanagan (1978), Gugler and Geschiere (1998) and Gugler (2002) on rural urban connections.

This study will therefore focus on the changing social and mental process of these urbanites and how it is affecting those left behind as pointed out in Yoyo's interview. Using different case studies to show how urban elite are actively urbanising the rural area, thus, transforming the landscape which is affecting the local socio-political hierarchies. This is not very new in the literature as this process has been described already by many scholars. For instance, Gugler (2002) maintains that, most rural-urban migrants maintain significant ties with their communities of origin in Africa south of the Sahara. Contrary to "modernist" assumptions that these ties would fade away, they often continue to be strong. This urban-rural connection has important consequences for rural-urban migration, for urban-rural return migration, for the rural economy, and for the political process. Depending on their migration strategies, urban residents connect with a range of actors at the rural end: more or less closely related kin, kinship groups, non-kin groups, communities, and larger political entities. These connections play out differently for men and women.

Dike (1982) studied two Igbo communities in Eastern Nigeria on how the urbanites were involved in urbanising these rural areas through their landed investments (modern houses) and public infrastructure like schools, roads, health centres and water supply amongst others provided for in theory by the government. Dike saw this process taking place as rural development but paid little attention to the fact that by bringing these urban amenities and facilities into the rural area, it is also changing the social and mental processes of the rural population. Visibly or invisibly, rural populations are therefore brought face to face with urban realities.

Fisiy and Goheen (1998) delve into the nature and structure of linkages between the urban elite and local institutions in their home communities in the Nso' area in the Grassfields of the North West Region of Cameroon. They argue that indigenous institutions provide a frame of reference for the negotiation of identity and the provision of security in a context where state institutions seem to have lost their "raison d'être". They further demonstrate how the home community has become a defining factor in the urban-rural nexus which allows the elite to acquire resources from external sources which they in turn invest in the production of social and symbolic capital. The materialisation of this capital is manifested in the acquisition of neo-traditional titles. Under conditions of dire financial and material hardship some local traditional authorities have started to 'commodify' what was previously earned through merit and service to the group.

Nyamnjoh and Rowlands (1998), illustrate how the development of elite associations has been a consequence of the growth of multi-partism and the weakening of authoritarian state control in Cameroon in the 1990s. The attachment of electoral votes and

rights of citizenship to belonging to ethnicised regions has encouraged the formal distinction between 'natives' and 'strangers' in the creation of a politics of belonging. They further argue that this development has also led to the replacement of political parties at the local level by ethnicised elite associations as prime movers in regional and national politics. Geschiere and Gugler (1998) point to the emphasis on the continuing importance of rural urban connections as a special aspect of urbanisation in Africa since the 1960s. They state that since in many parts of Africa, the involvement of urbanites with their 'home' community has increased rather than decreased the content of the exchanges and the moral involvement of city people and members of the home community in such relations vary greatly. The variations have important implications for regional differences in, for instance, the development of new modes of accumulation or the cementing of ethnic networks. Geschiere and Gugler argue further that in many parts of Africa, democratisation seems to evoke an obsession with 'autochthony', origin and belonging. The increasing role of elite associations, as an alternative to multi-party politics, makes the rural connection of vital importance to urban politicians. Hence 'the community', and more generally the region of origin, acquire new importance as a power base in national politics.

Jua (2002) in the study of the Njinikom Area Development Association (NADA) examines the truth claims of this adage that, 'small is beautiful and seeks to make connections between the local, national and global developments', revealing not only their dynamics but uncovering how these mediate the defining of selfhood among NADA members. NADA, he argues is also a space for violence (symbolic) engendered by the conflict of two rationalities and the penchant for politicizing even economic issues. Outcomes of struggles are skewed in favour of the elite who are empowered with symbolic capital and money. Differential empowerment gives them an advantage that is used in promoting the birth of a new consciousness. Its effects are far reaching as they breach all accepted and acceptable protocol. Furthermore, it shows that the elite are willing to invest in the development of the community only if it is a win-win game. Present development strategies seem to gloss over most of these considerations, thus impairing their effectiveness.

Evans (2010) through people's participation in hometown associations reveals a deep sense of belonging to their home place. It has been argued that promotion of this 'primary patriotism' by associations is potentially divisive as it may engender parochialism, increase the focus on autochthony, and enhance ethnicisation of the political landscape. Evans in contrasting views, however, does not see hometown associations as necessarily inimical to wider social and political cohesion, but as potential sites for civic engagement and citizenship formation at different levels, reflecting the shifting identity that individuals hold. His article explores these issues among the two main tiers of association in Manyu Division, South-West Region, Cameroon. It briefly describes their history and activities, and considers how the identities mobilizing them are constructed in three interlinked ways: geo-historical and genealogical; neo-traditional; and national political. Evans concludes that while these associations occasionally engage in divisive politics in different spheres, analysis needs to balance this against their other activities and relationships. Most hometown associations continue in their original, social role of mutual support among rural-urban migrants, although their expansion into development at home has had more mixed results. Furthermore, concerns about parochialism are often hard to reconcile with the multiple levels of associational life observed.

Based on their assessment of hometown association in Cameroon, Page, Evans and Mercer (2010) argue that notions of autochthony remain central in understanding Cameroonian politics. However, the three articles presented here as a group go on to argue that some of the claims about home, belonging and politics are difficult to reconcile with the hazier reality observed on the ground. The articles aim to disturb any universal, inevitable or overly tidy segue between questions of belonging and claims of political segmentation. Too often the existing literature moves too quickly to an analysis that foregrounds only the worrisome dimensions of a politics of belonging, thus leaving little space for other interpretations. To explore this dilemma, Page, Evans and Mercer continue by exploring a land dispute in Bali Nyonga, North West Region of Cameroon. They find three salient points showing how: ideas of belonging remain central to the practice of politics; how politics of belonging has changed over time; and how it is possible to foreground an alternative 'politics of conviviality', which would otherwise be shaded out by the dominance of the politics of belonging within the literature.

How are these urbanites organised in their various urban centres? These activities which Dike (1982) noted also bring to mind Nkwi (1997) and Jua (2002) on the formation, rule and activities of the Njinikom Area Development Association, (NADA) of the Western Grassfields. This is a vivid example of how the urban elite especially those in high governmental positions lobby and navigate to bring back urban amenities and facilities to their home communities. With the lobby system in place for contracts with hardly any clear cut formula, interpersonal connections of these urbanites become essential as they are able to follow the tides, negotiate and navigate their way through the system to bring and/or carryout projects in their home communities. As such, major local roads, schools, health centres and others linking people have been constructed as well as water and electricity provided even though Evans (2010) points out that this is not all positive. During the process of bringing these urban amenities and facilities to the community's, one can experience different modes of mobility such as physical, psychological and mental which take various forms.

Baba I have tentacles spread throughout the national territory and abroad but the community is the pivot. The houses served as my connecting point because the researcher found them embedded with knowledge. This fell squarely in the line of thought of Hoskins, that 'objects can be given a gender, name, history and ritual function. Some objects can be so closely associated with persons as to seem inalienable (Weiner 1992), and some persons – slaves, dependants – can have their own humanity depreciated so as to approach the status of simple possessions. Within this framework, things can be said to have biographies' as they go through a series of transformations from gift to commodity to inalienable possessions, and persons can also be said to invest aspects of their own biographies in things' (Hoskins 2006:74). In concordance with Hoskins, my focus definitely stayed with these houses.

1.5: The Research Questions

In this section based on the above discussion of the literatures and the topics that are mentioned will define the research questions. These are taken up chapter per chapter; Therefore this will keep track of my main themes, amongst which are the following: material culture and the visual system; the social life of stuff; mobility and mobile communities, bushfalling as a sub discussion; (r)urbanisation as a consequence of these including the changes in land access and demography as an issue.

The thesis is pegged on four crucial points. First, migration and mobility have changed over the past decades; it would be interesting to know how this relates to older forms. Finding out the difference would help to further understand the process within the community. What can we say about changes, also in hierarchies? In the newer forms of mobility investing at home has become very important because of the prestige which goes with this type of investments on houses. Second, what is behind material culture? What can we read in it; what have others said about this phenomenon in Cameroon and through which eyes do they analyse it? Third, belonging and emotional ties: how is this related to material culture and what have others said about this phenomenon in this region of the country? Finally, hierarchical relations: how these are linked to old rules of access to land; how this is related to the houses; the way these are now put in place. The land issue also brings in historical patterns of ownership of houses and land. Here I will also delve into that explanation that in the past land and houses were together, and ownership was not always in the hand of the user. The process of bushfelling which is intrinsically and extrinsically linked with mobility, urbanisation and material culture will be the guide post of my discussion. A bushfaller denotes mobility and tangible and intangible changes within the communities as an attestation of achievement and belonging. In this study, Bushfallers, Urbanites and elite will be used interchangeably to mean the category of persons living in the urban centres but who through their physical and social investments at home are causing transforming changes in the landscape. This will go a long way in answering the question on the category of persons building in Baba I.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

This thesis has been structured into seven chapters. Chapter One focuses on the general introduction of the conceptual framework of the study. Material Culture and Migration/Mobility are the main concepts that stand as the guide post through which the development of proceeding chapters will ensue to attain the objectives of the study. Chapter Two examines how I gained entry and went about collecting data and what I know about Baba I. It will further examine the methodology of data collection that were used as well as the photographs and films, other media through which societies are presented and represented; a deeper reflection on the film involving the process of production will be handled in chapter seven. The methodology chapter will be an independent and integral part of the thesis elaborating more on the reflexivity and subjectivity of the central problem. Chapter Three goes to situate and trace the history of the Papiakum people. This will unfold the basic ethnography of Baba I paving way to go into the materiality and changing socio-political landscape of the people. and delves into the basic land tenure system of the Cameroon in general and Baba I in particular in Chapter Four. Houses are constructed and before you construct land is imperative. Land acquisition has not been static therefore the demand has been changing as migrants return to acquire it. Above all the chapter contributes to the relationship between the chapter and urbanisation thesis.

Chapter Five handles the core questions on mobility focusing on the literature on migration and mobility. History of mobility from and in Papiakum; relation to literatures on the Grassfields; elaborate on the dire need of most migrants to remain connected with those left behind in their various mobilities. By expanding on the meaning and use of material culture, it illustrates how belonging is gained, maintained or lost amongst the Papiakum as identities are questioned to attest belonging especially by those living and working in various urban centres. Following the discussions in chapters three and four, Chapter Six examines the transformation process of the architectural landscape and infrastructure which

is the crux of this study. Our discussions here bring out the meaning and significance of Nda (house) among the Papiakum and how the development of these Nda through mobility are changing the landscape thus ushering in the process of urbanisation. It further explores the central discussion of the thesis on material culture which is both tangible and intangible. The pith of the discussion here is on how through material culture we will gain insight into character and community structure which reveals emotional qualities. This involves examining utilitarian constructions, houses, to determine the values they embody among the Papiakum. Delving into these houses will inherently expose drives and aspirations in this class structured community bringing about transformations on the landscape through textual and visual forms.

Chapter Seven dwells on the summary and significance of the film; how it contributes in answering the central question of the thesis. The process of the production of the film will be elaborated which binds the visual systems of the Papiakum people. Chapter Eight serves as the concluding unit of this study. It is the synthesis of the conclusions of the various chapters showing how mobility in all its forms stands out as a key vector in the process of transforming landscape in the communities. This thesis has established that through mobility the actions/activities of those migrants who left for greener pastures are having implications on their lives and those of the others in the community. This is so because whatever project they are carrying out does not just look at the nuclear family but opens up to the whole community as their participation cannot be ignored be it in kind, cash or moral. The constructions (houses) do not only attest the maturity and belonging of its members but also creates new social classes with the type of houses built by the Papiakum people. Social hierarchies are created, reinforced or even lost with the coming of these changes brought in as a result of mobility. It has therefore made it very difficult for one not to participate or be involved in the rural community developmental projects as it is an expectation of the community. Participation forms the kernel of acceptance and belonging in the community which is visibly displayed during socio-cultural and political gatherings as portrayed in the film “THE PAPIAKUM PEOPLE”.