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Afoysiina-a-kfaang (food of newness) Cultigens in Global migration flows in Kom, Cameroon since the 1650s

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***Afoysiina-a-kfaang* (food of newness): Cultigens in Global migration flows in Kom, Cameroon since the 1650s**

Walter Gam Nkwi

Introduction: The past in the present

I am Walter Gam Nkwi. I grew up in West and Central Africa eating fufu-corn (*abain* as it is known in the language spoken by the Kom) at least twice a day, as it is the staple diet of Kom people. It is made from maize. I also ate Guinea corn, groundnuts, beans, pears, plantains, and bananas before I became a high skilled migrant to the Netherlands in the autumn of 2019 at the University of Leiden. Although I have been interested in migration and its relations with communication technology, it had not yet dawned on me to give a proper historical reflection of cultigens. Despite the fact that people eat these foods throughout the year on a daily basis, and even carry out rituals with some of them, I have not come across anything interestingly written about cultigens and how these foods came about to be where they are cultivated now in the Kom, Northwest Cameroon. That is the gap which this article sets out to fill. To most people, if not to all, it is a given that the foodstuffs were always there. It became even clearer to me when the *Leidschrift* editors approached me to write an article for this edition that I decided to reflect on the migration of foodstuffs to the Kom. Consequently, this article examines foodstuffs which are cultivated and eaten today in the Kom and the Bamenda Grassfields at large. The article is further predicated on the fact that to understand how these foodstuffs travelled, it is imperative to take into account three relevant factors: the Bantu migration, slave trade, and long distance trade. These dynamics combined and transformed the regional food and cultural landscape, and by extension led to the development of technological know-how to cultivate them. Today these foodstuffs are more present in ritual ceremonies.

Further, I was inspired by Jean Pierre Warner's article, 'The Grassfields of Cameroon: Center or Periphery?', in which he states that the people of the Bamenda Grassfields have existed in their present location for a much longer time (probably two millennia or more). This world was the center of a wide regional trading system long before it has been assumed by the western anthropologists and historians as being a recent creation. He further shows

that sometime around the eighteenth century, the Grassfields entered into a commercial relationship with a 'world system' based in the Indian Ocean.¹ This article focuses on the Kom, an indigenous Bamenda Grassfields group of Northwest Cameroon.² It was through the migration of people, goods, and ideas, that most cultigens came into this subregion. The article is also inspired by John Urry, who shows that in migration not only people migrate, but also goods and ideas migrate.³

This article uses *kfaang*, a concept which I developed during my PhD research amongst the Kom of Northwest Cameroon. According to the Kom people, *kfaang* translates to newness – innovation and novelty in thinking and doing, and the material indicators and relationships that result from it. *Kfaang* can be internally generated, but it is almost invariably externally induced. In many ways, it translates but is not limited to 'modernity' and 'modernisation' in the Western sense, as things of local origin might also be labelled *kfaang*, even when they are clearly not foreign or Western. Therefore, the most important characteristic of *kfaang* is that which is 'new'. This might be internally generated, which is not the characteristic way of seeing and doing for the Kom people. Kom people accepted and appropriated it only when it was relevant for their needs. Depending upon the circumstances, *kfaang* denotes a process and a product. Both involve change mediated by mobility or migration, and by implicating the technologies which facilitated spatial and social mobility. *Afoysiina* means food in *itangikom* (the language spoken by Kom people), and *kfaang* means newness. Therefore *afoysiina-a-kfaang* means food of newness. The Kom do not make a difference between crops and cooked food. They all have the same meaning, whether cooked or not. In my research amongst the Kom I tried to understand how colonial technologies like schools, motorable roads, cars, and the church caused social change and

¹ J. P. Warnier, 'The Grassfields of Cameroon: Center or Periphery?', *Africa Today* 58.3 (2012) 73-75, Special Issue: Central Peripheries and Sliding.

² The Bamenda Grassfields is a name given by the Germans in the 1890s because of its grassy field savannah interspersed in the valleys with trees. This ecotone is made up of about one hundred and fifty ethnic groups. For more on this see E. M. Chilver and P. M. Kaberry, 'The Chronology of Bamenda Grassfields', *Journal of African History*, 11.2 (1970) 249-257; E.M. CHILVER, *Zintgraff's exploration in Bamenda, Adamawa and the Benue lands, 1889-1892*. Buea, Cameroon, 1966); H.Rudin, *The Germans in Cameroon: A Case Study in Modern Imperialism* (Yale, 1938)

³ J. Urry, *Mobility* (London 2009)

produced new hierarchies. The product of that research was my PhD thesis.⁴ I continued research on that topic and in 2015, I published a book, *Modernities and Mobilities in Africa: An Ethnographic History of Kom, 1800-2008*, which is based on my PhD thesis

In writing the foreword to that volume, Emeritus Professor Jean-Pierre Warnier of *Ethnologue, Centre d'études Africaines*, EHESS, Paris, France said *inter alia*:

Kfaang, says Walter Nkwi, is nothing new. *Kfaang* did not begin with the Bamenda-Kom tarred road, nor with the dirt road. Neither did *kfaang* begin with the introduction of the coastal consumer goods in the 1920s. *Kfaang* did not begin with the import of guns, gunpowder and beads long before the reign of Fon Yuh. Walter Nkwi is a historian. He knows that two, three centuries in the past, Kom people were mobile. They experienced change, they were communicating and exchanging information and knowledge. They had their own techniques to do so.... Anytime as from 1600, Kom farmers, like the coastal and Grassfields people, began experiencing with new cultigens that came from Latin America, especially groundnuts, tobacco, and certain kinds of beans. Later on, around the middle of the 19th century, they adopted maize. Around the turn of the 20th century they started cultivating even more American cultigens: manioc, tomato, potatoes. With each new crop came assorted bodies of knowledge on their cultivation, so there was *kfaang* in the 17th century and even long before. This implies that, if you want to analyse the way it works, you have to look way back into the past and get interested in history. Walter Nkwi's book is about the history of *kfaang*. His concern is to document and analyze this kind of historical processes, and what it produces as regards being a Kom subject. How does it shape Kom subjects and their identity? His book does not only concern ideas that people have in their minds, but also their practices, and what they perform in everyday life with what has come into their society by way of migration.⁵

⁴ W. G. Nkwi, *Kfaang and its technologies: Towards a Social History of Mobility in Kom, Cameroon, 1928-1998* (Leiden 2011).

⁵ J. P. Warnier, 'Foreword' p.vi, in: W. G. Nkwi, *African Modernities and Mobilities: An Ethnographic History of Kom, 1800-2018*. Emphasis on the original. (Mankon, Bamenda 2015).

Taking the relay-baton from this forward, I wish to show how migration of cultigens as a whole shaped the Kom society. The cultigens which are cultivated annually amongst the Kom and eaten on a daily basis, shows how the interconnection of the Kom with other areas of the South or out of the European borders affected their everyday lives. In a global perspective, it shows the Kom as part of the global communication ecology.⁶

The *Fondom* of Kom is located in the Bamenda Grassfields in the present-day Northwest region of Cameroon. *Fondoms* are socio-political units which grew out of the politics of aggressiveness, attacking, and subduing weaker neighbours. They are ruled by *Fons* or *Foyns*, who are imbued with quasi-religious functions and are therefore considered to be sacred. They are custodians of tradition and culture, and chief priest of their societies.⁷ Geographically, the Kom is estimated to be 280 square miles.⁸ This makes it the second largest *Fondom*, after Nso, in the entire Bamenda Grassfields.⁹ The Kom *Fondom* was probably founded around the mid-eighteenth century.¹⁰ It includes sub-chiefdoms which were incorporated into Kom property as 'vassal states' by Fon Yuh (c.1865-1912), the seventh ruler of Kom. These tributary chiefdoms included Achain, Ake, Ajung, Mbesinaku, Mbueni, Baiso, Baicham, Mejang, Mbengkas and Mejung.¹¹ The tributary chiefdoms

⁶ Global communication ecology is a concept which was developed by M. de Bruijn. For more see, M. E. de Bruijn, 'Mobile Interconnections: Reinterpreting Distance and relating in the Cameroonian Grassfields', *Journal of African Media Studies* 2.3 (2010) 267-285.

⁷ P. N. Nkwi 'Becoming Foyin among the Kom of the Cameroon Western Grassfield', *Paideuma* 36 (1990) 238-290.

⁸ E. M. Chilver, 'The Kingdom of Kom in West Cameroon' in: D. Forde and P. M. Kaberry ed., *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford 1967) 123-151.

⁹ File Ad/2 Bikom Assessment Report by G. V. Evans, District Officer for Bamenda, 1927. Nation Archives Buea, Cameroon; Chilver, 'The kingdom of Kom' 123-151. Also see E. M. Chilver, *Traditional Bamenda: The pre-colonial history and ethnography of the Bamenda Grassfields* (Buea, Cameroon 1967); M. Terretta, *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence: nationalism, Grassfields tradition, and state building in Cameroon* (Athens 2014).

¹⁰ This date was created by calculating when the first Foyin ruled Kom. He was Njinabo I (1700-1788). See P. N. Nkwi, *Traditional Government and Social Change: A Study of the Political Institutions Among the Kom of the Cameroon Grassfields* (Fribourg, Switzerland 1976).

¹¹ E. M. Chilver, 'Chronological synthesis: The western region, comprising the western grassfields, Bamum, the Bamileke chiefdoms and the central Mbam' in: C. Tardits, ed., *The contribution of ethnological research to the history of Cameroon cultures* (Paris

illustrates the politics of state building in Africa long before colonialism. The Kom shares its eastern boundary with the kingdoms of Oku and Nso and the southern frontier with Kedjom Keku or Big Babanki and Ndop plain. Bafut is on the western border while to the north Bum and Mmen can be found. The Kom is a subset of the Bamenda Grassfields.¹²

In a more panoramic view, the Kom is located within the Bamenda Grassfields, which are made of an energetic ecotone which uniquely covers the present day Northwest region of Cameroon. It lies between West and Central Africa and is a very key region for understanding and appreciating the sixteenth century African continent.¹³ Many scholars have bookmarked this region as the datum point of the Bantu languages and migration, as well as the primary source of ancient sedentary cultures for Central Africa.¹⁴ This area saw the explosion of a mystifying number of states, known as kingdoms or *Fondoms*, speculated via archaeological evidence to have begun as early as the sixteenth century.¹⁵ Passing through this region in 1917, Captain L. W. G. Malcolm noted in his diary that, 'in physical appearance the people of this region are well built and in many cases are of excellent physique...and well noted for their competence...'¹⁶ The Grassfields, in which the Kom is at the centre, has a mundane climate as it is located in a mountainous region ranging between 1000-1300 meters above sea level. Besides, the soils are very rich to sustain agriculture and today it is assumed that the region presents the highest population density in Africa.¹⁷

1981) 453-475; P. N. Nkwi and J. P. Warnier, *Elements for History of the Bamenda Grassfields*, (Yaounde, Cameroon), 65-68.

¹² Nkwi, *Kjaang and its technologies*.

¹³ P. Lavachery, 'The Holocene Archeological Sequence of Shum Laka Rock Shelter (Grassfields, Western Cameroon)', *The African Archaeological Review*, 18.4 (2001) 213.

¹⁴ Y. Bastin, A. Coupeux and B. de Halleux, 'Classification lexicostatistique des langues bantoues' 214 releves', *Bulletin des Seances de l'Academie Royale des Sciences d'Outremer* 27.2 (1983) 173-191.

¹⁵ M. D. Delancey, *The Cameroon Grassfields States in a Broader History of Nigeria* (2019).

¹⁶ L. W. G. Malcolm, 'Notes on the Cameroon Province (with Special Reference to the Bamenda Division)', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, 36 (1917) 145-153.

¹⁷ K. Stallcup, 'La geographie linguistique des Grassfields', in: L. M. Hyman and J. Voorhoeve ed., *l'Expansion Bantoue* (Paris 1980) 43-57; J. Maley, 'The Climatic and Vegetational history of the equatorial regions of Africa during the Upper Quaternary' in: T. Shaw, P. Sinclair, B. Andah, and A. Opoko ed., *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns* (London 1993).

Although it is usually acknowledged that Bamenda Grassfields is a recent creation, archaeological findings have proven that people lived in this area some three millennia ago.¹⁸ The people lived in *Fondoms*, some as large as 280 square miles.¹⁹ When the Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884, they were anxious to pacify these people, so they coerced them under a common administrative district known as the 'Bamenda Berzirk'.²⁰ Therefore, the name Bamenda Grassfields dates back to the period of the German colonisation (1884-1916). It is used to connote that part of the hinterlands that was characterised with high altitude and grassy nature. Except for the forest galleries, the area is full of beautiful grassy scenery. The indigenous population of the area immigrated from various directions and these groups can be placed under five major headings: Tikar, Widikum, Chamba, Tiv, and Mbembe.²¹

For the purpose of clarity, the article has been structured as follows: After the introduction, the second part takes a look at African migration out of European borders with focus on Africa and Latin America. The third part will take up the migration of cultigens into the Kom and the role of long distance traders and the ramifications of these cultigens in the sub-region.

Contemporary migration studies have focussed mostly on South-North patterns. This means that more migrants went from the southern countries to the north, which simply means migrating from developing to developed societies. Essentially it has been an African-Europe and America affair. However, historically there have been South-South migrations for a long time with very deep ramifications on the African continent. This article attempts not to focus on the migration of people, but rather on food crops from Latin America and Asia to the Kom, a Northwest *Fondom* located in central Bamenda Grassfields. The introduction of these foodstuffs gave rise to new ways of cultures and life in the region as it will be demonstrated in this article. Through this article, I will state that human agency came with the cultigens. Notwithstanding, it is amazing how many foreigners think that Africa exists outside the political, commercial, and social circuits that constitute the world's nerve system. A large part of the reason that Africa is

¹⁸ Lavachery, 'The Holocene Archaeological Sequence', 213-247.

¹⁹ Kom is a kingdom that is estimated 280 square miles. For more see: Forde and Kaberry, *West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century*.

²⁰ H. Rudin, *The German in Cameroon: Case Study in Modern Imperialism* (Yale 1938).

²¹ P. N. Nkwi, *Traditional Diplomacy: A Study of Inter Chiefdom Relations in the Western Grassfields, North West Province of Cameroon* (Yaounde 1987).

sometimes perceived as immobile, is because its connections with the practical networks and institutions that constitute globalisation are often made via their hidden side and in unexpected ways. As already said in this article, migration has often been constructed as a South-North movement rather than a South-South movement. Even when it is constructed, the evidence is quite tiny and foodstuffs have not taken center stage yet in scholarship. Far from the modernisation and modernity paradigm, long constructed on western ideology lenses, this article shows that people acted as independent agents or conduits which transmitted new foodstuffs to their remote villages in Africa, taking the Kom of the Western Cameroon Grassfields as a case study.

Migration revisited: Africa

Africa is assumed to be the most mobile continent.²² People in Africa have been migrating for a very long time. In most of the oral traditions of African societies migration occurs in the narratives. Their movements occur within, as well as out of the continent.

Migration within the continent of Africa had been going on for a very long time even during European rule. However, scholars and researchers have studied this concept from a multifarious perspective. For instance, Amin shows that migrations are not new to Africa. According to him, modern migrations are related to labour problems and he classifies them as: rural-rural, rural-urban, urban-rural, internal, and international migrations.²³ Adepoju claims that 'Africa is a continent of considerable (...) migrations and various movements in response to political, social, economic, religious, and security situations have been recorded from earliest times'.²⁴ De Bruijn and Van Dijk and Waller studied population mobility in West Africa with a special focus on the Fulbe pastoralists of Central and South Mali. They came to the conclusion that 'mobility was one of the most important responses by the inhabitants of the Sahel to climatic adversity'.²⁵ These scholars have studied migration in

²² M. de Bruijn, D. W. J. Foeken and R. van Dyke, *Mobile Africa: changing patterns of movement in Africa and beyond* (Leiden 2001) 1.

²³ S. Amin, *Modern Migration in Western Africa* (London 1977) 76.

²⁴ A. Adepoju, *Trends in International Migration in and from Africa* (London 1974), 89.

²⁵ A. Adepoju, *International migration within, to and from Africa in a globalized world* (Lagos 2010); A. Adepoju, 'Migration and development in tropical Africa: Some research

terms of migratory cultures. Labour migration at the advent of European colonisation has also been responsible for internal migrations in the continent and scholars have taken keen attention to this. Harris' work on the migrant labour from Mozambique to the sugarcane plantations, and the diamond and gold mines of South Africa, shows how these migrants arrived in South Africa with different cultural values. Their contacts with other Africans and whites enabled them to forge a new type of culture. Davidson's work on migrant labour in the Gold Coast and Van Onselen's work on Southern Africa, show the relationship which existed between labour migration and different forms of communication and labour identity in Southern Rhodesia between 1900 and 1933.²⁶ Again, South-South migrations are interesting and relevant, and have been going on for more than four centuries.

Migratory Evidence of food crops in the Kom

The father of archaeology in Anglophone West African universities, Thurstan Shaw, remarks the presence of a densely and anciently settled population around the Niger Delta, Igbo land, and the Tiv countries south of the Benue River, based on the domestication of yams and a nearly complete diet provided by yams and palm oil right from the inception of the Neolithic.²⁷ This area includes the Grassfields, which by extension include the Kom. Besides, there are cereals of African origin, which include sorghum, grown in the Kom and most of the Grassfields societies.²⁸

priorities', *African Affairs*, 76.303 (1977) 210-225. Adepoju's other works are also relevant: 'Linkages between internal and international migration: The African situation', *International Social Science Journal*, 50.157 (1998) 387-395; M. de Bruijn and H. van Dijk, 'Changing population mobility in West Africa: Fulbe pastoralists in Central and South Mali', *African Affairs*, 102.407 (2003) 285-307; R. Waller, 'Ecology, migration and expansion in East Africa', *African Affairs*, 84.336 (1985) 345-370.

²⁶ P. Harris, *Work, culture and identity: Migrant laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910: Social History of Africa* (London 1994); R. B. Davidson, *Migrant labour in the Gold Coast* (Achimota 1954); C. van Onselen, *Chibaro: African mine labour in Southern Rhodesia, 1900-1933* (Johannesburg 1984).

²⁷ T. Shaw, 'Early Crops in Africa: A Review of the Evidence' in: J. R. Harlan, J. M. De Wet and A. B. Stemler ed., *Origins of African Plant Domestication* (The Hague, Paris, 1976) 107-154.

²⁸ H. Zimon, 'Guinea Corn Harvest Rituals amongst Konkomba of Northeast Ghana', *Anthropos*, 84 (1989) 447-458.

Migration has been earmarked as the main dynamic responsible for the introduction of such foodstuffs in the region. The particular typology of migration is the Bantu migration, which was a series of movements of the original Proto-Bantu speakers from Central/West Africa to the South between the years 1500 and 2000. Yet there has been much speculation about the possible connexion between the introduction of Asian food crops in the area under consideration, and the diffusion of Bantu languages following the so-called Bantu migration hypothesis.²⁹ The Bantuists assume that the Proto-Bantu speaking settlers displaced or absorbed pre-existing hunter-gatherers and pastoralist groups, which they encountered, and also came with their own cultures and foodstuffs.³⁰ The prime evidence for this expansion was linguistic, because it is assumed that many languages spoken across Sub-Equatorial Africa are remarkably similar to each other. Similar foodstuffs, like maize and Guinea Corn, also suggest that they came into this region as a result of the migration.³¹ However, attempts to trace the exact routes of their expansion, to connect it with archaeological evidence, have not been conclusive. Thus, although it is widely accepted that this expansion took place, many aspects of it remain unsure and/or are highly contested.³² The debate of Bantu migration has continued and it is still on-going today.³³ Nonetheless, the importance and ever presence, especially plantain and banana in rituals, suggests an early introduction of those crops around the southern Cameroon forest margins. Plantains and bananas are certainly Asian

²⁹ Many scholars have propounded Bantus Hypothesis, see J. H. Greenberg, 'Linguistic Evidence Regarding Bantu Origins', *Journal of African History*, 13.2 (1972) 189-216; P.D.Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (Madison, 1964), 399-400.

³⁰ J. M. Hombert, P. Mouguiama-Daouda and G. Philipson, 'Bantu Expansion and Hunter Gatherers' (3rd International Conference on Bantu Languages, Tervuren, March 25-28, 2009), 1-63.

³¹ R. Oliver, 'The Problem of the Bantu Expansion', *Journal of African History*, 7.3 (1966) 361-376.

³² J. Vansina, 'New Linguistic Evidence and the Bantu Expansion', *Journal of African History*, 36.2 (1995) 173-195; E. Pollard, C. Rosenberg and R. Tignor, *Worlds Apart: A History of the World; From Beginnings of Humankind to the Present* (New York 2011) 289.

³³ K. M. de Luna, 'Bantu expansion' (now under revision to update 2013 version) in: T. Spears ed., *Oxford Bibliographies in 'African Studies'* (Oxford 2014).

food crops and they arrived in the Kom following the Bantu migration.³⁴ This must have reached the Kom on human backs as portage was the only method of transport long before transport by wheel was introduced by the Europeans.³⁵

Although Afro-centric scholars have always got the tendency to portray slave trade and slavery as negative, which of course is true, it was also through this insidious trade that some of the cultigens from Latin America arrived in the Kom region.³⁶ However, manioc (*manihot esculenta*) and maize (*zea mays*) only seemed to have arrived in this region in the twentieth century.³⁷ Maize replaced sorghum, and manioc provided a poorer substitute for yams as from 1918.³⁸ This replacement was for no explicit reason but for the preference of the indigenous people. The general conclusion, as insinuated by Warnier, suggests that the Kom agricultural-systems appeared to develop an excellent carrying capacity right from the start of the Neolithic, with the two main African crop complexes (root crops and cereals), complemented by the Asian and the American ones.³⁹ Meanwhile groundnuts were used more for commercial purposes.⁴⁰ Many other indigenous groups cultivated groundnuts and other crops in the region.⁴¹ These foodstuffs, maize and sorghum, came with technological innovations and agency. Agency is a sociological term which is defined as the capacity of individuals to critically evaluate and reconstruct the conditions of their own lives given certain

³⁴ C. Mbida, V. N. Wim, H. Doutrelepon and L. Vrydaghs 'Evidence for Banana Cultivation and Animal Husbandry during the First Millennium BC in the Forest of Southern Cameroon', *Journal of Archaeological Science*, 27 (2000) 151-162.

³⁵ Long distance trade has been one of the ways in which most cultigens, as well as spices, reached Kom. See Nkwi, *Kfaang and its technologies*. Chapter three is quite relevant for the long distance.

³⁶ P. N. Nkwi, 'Slavery and Slave Trade in the Kom Kingdom of the 19th Century', *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, 41 (1995) 239-249.

³⁷ Nkwi and Warnier, *Elements for history of the Bamenda Grassfields*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ My parents were groundnut farmers and I was educated throughout my primary education with money gotten from selling groundnuts. Many other people did the same.

⁴¹ Nkwi and Warnier, *Elements for history of the Bamenda Grassfields*.

circumstances and structures, and make their own choices.⁴² Faced with the new crops in the Kom, the Kom people developed new ways to cultivate the crops and also to sustain them. The new ways of cultivation included the use of chief priests who were used to placed ‘magical’ medicines on the farms to ward off storms that could destroy the crops as well as organising festivals to inaugurate the planting season.⁴³ Thus, the new cultigens were used in rituals as well as becoming staple food diets.⁴⁴

The long distance trade which took the Kom traders to the Bight of Biafra at the coast and to Yola in northern Nigeria (almost at the fringes of the desert), were also responsible for the introduction of new foodstuffs in the region.⁴⁵ The European contact with the coast of Cameroon attracted Kom traders towards that direction and the result was the carrying of new foodstuffs into the Kom. The introduction of Latin American crops, especially groundnuts (*arachis hypogaea*) and bananas (*musa acuminata*), probably dates back to the earliest European contacts with the coastal areas through slave trade. It must be kept in mind that the Kom lays within 375 kilometres from the coast. While doing research amongst the Kom in 2009, some long distance traders narrated their heroic activities of travelling for thirtyone days to the coast and thirty days back to the Kom. They did not only bring groundnuts, but spices as well, and palm oil which was carried from the valleys. This was like a ‘rite de passage’ for them to be called men.⁴⁶

The introduction of new cultigens developed new ways of life and culture. One of these ways were rituals. Rituals occupy a special place in Kom history just as in the Bamenda Grassfields and many parts of Africa.⁴⁷ Maize

⁴² M. Emirbayer and A. Mische, ‘What Is Agency?’ *American Journal of Sociology*, 103.4 (1998) 962-1023; W. Johnson, ‘On Agency’ *Journal of Social History*, (fall 2003):114-123.

⁴³ P.M. Kaberry, *Women of the Grassfields: A Study of the economic position of Women in Bamenda, British Cameroons* (London and New York, 1952) 75-87.

⁴⁴ W. G. Nkwi, ‘The Sacred Forest and the Mythical Python: Ecology, Conservation, and Sustainability in Kom, Cameroon, c. 1700-2000’ *Journal of Global Initiatives: Policy, Pedagogy and Perspectives*, 11.2 (2017) 31-47.

⁴⁵ R. A. Austen and J. Derrick, *The Middlemen of Cameroons Rivers: The Douala and Their Hinterlands, c.1600-1960* (Cambridge 1999).

⁴⁶ Personal communication with long distance traders, 20 August 2009, Njinkom, Kom, Cameroon.

⁴⁷ M. T. Drewal, ‘Ritual Performance in Africa Today’, *The Drama Review*, 32.2 (1998) 25-30; A. O. Izebigie, ‘Olokun: Afocal Study of Religion and Art in Benin’ (Phd Diss.

and Guinea corn or Sorghum are central to ritualistic religion. These foodstuffs were used during the rituals (*Fuchuo* and *azeah*) to initiate the planting season. At the start of the planting season the chief priests, who are usually selected from the founding lineages of the Kom (*ekwu* and *achaff*), perform these rituals. Religious rituals were performed in a sacred forest to inaugurate the beginning of the planting season.⁴⁸ The high priests performed the rituals in a dedicated shrine located in the sacred forest. *Fuchuo* was the name of the ritual carried out by the *achaff* and *ekwu* priests to inaugurate the planting season and ensure the constant supply of food in the Kom *Fondom*. The shrine (*ndo-fuchuo*), stood in a spot held to be the place where the python disappeared.⁴⁹ It stood on three pillars with a grass thatch roof. The performance of the ritual by the *ekwu* and *achaff* priests was because of their proximity to their traditional settlement when they arrived in Laikom. The toponymic explanation further lends credence because the two lineages were kingmakers. They were thus thought to be sacred. Prior to the ritual, the path leading to the shrine was cleared (*usu leng fuchuo*) and the following day the priests offer Guinea corn porridge (*sorghum bicolor*), palm oil (*Elaeis Guineensis*), salt (*sodium chloride*), and palm wine, a white milky substance extracted from palm trees.⁵⁰ The rite was followed by a libation in the *ntul* shrine poured by the *fon* and *achaff* priests who both offer prayers for peace, fertility, and more food in the kingdom.⁵¹

These foodstuffs also coincided with iron technology, which has been in existence for 5000 years before these crops were introduced. Scholars have taken up keen interest in the study of iron technology in this area. Although not specifically Kom, this technology or iron tools also migrated into the Kom and within the region. Some of the earliest scholars that were interested in this region, Ian Fowler and Jean Pierre Warnier, estimated that approximately 100 tons of iron were produced annually by just one of the

University of Washington, 1978); P. Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris 1959); J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London 1969).

⁴⁸ Nkwi, 'The Sacred Forest', 31-47.

⁴⁹ In Kom migratory mythological history, it is assumed that they were led by a python to their present site some 400 years ago. Where the python a forest grew up on the spot and the forest is used to supply the Kom with magical plants. For more on this see, C. Geary, 'Ludwig Brandls Historical Notes on the Kingdom of Kom' (Cameroon), *Paideuma*, 26 (1980) 41-77.

⁵⁰ Nkwi, 'The Sacred Forest', 1-28.

⁵¹ J. Ndocha, personal communication, August 23, 2014.

iron smelting villages during the late nineteenth century, thereby becoming the 'Ruhr' of Africa.⁵² These iron tools were used for farming; cutlasses and hoes were smelted out of iron.⁵³ It is not clear whether the foodstuffs arrived earlier than the iron smelting. However, it is speculated that iron smelting technology came earlier and *ipso facto*, the introduction of new food crops were accommodated well because of the existence of the required technology to tame and cultivate it.

Conclusion

Contemporary migrations have a focus on South-North patterns. This means that more migrants went from the southern countries to the north, which simply means migrating from developing to developed societies. Essentially it has been an African-Europe/America affair. However, historically there have been South-South migrations for centuries, with very deep ramifications on the African continent. These migrations have hardly been studied by scholars. This article has attempted to trace not only the migration of people, but also food crops from Latin America and Asia to the Kom, a Northwest *Fondom* located in central Bamenda Grassfields. The introduction of these foodstuffs gave rise to new ways of cultures and life in the region, like iron technology and rituals.

Notwithstanding, it is amazing how many people think that Africa exists outside the political, commercial, and social circuits that constitute the world's nerve system. Africa is sometimes perceived as immobile, largely because its connections with the practical networks and institutions that constitute globalisation are often made in unexpected ways. Migration has

⁵² J. P. Warnier and I. Fowler, 'A Nineteenth Century Ruhr in Central Africa', *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 49.4 (1979) 329-351.

⁵³ For these scholars who have done path breaking research on iron smelting in the region see, M. Rowlands and J. P. Warnier, 'The Magical Production of Iron in the Cameroon Grassfields' in: T. Shaw, B. Anda and A. Okpoko ed., *The Archaeology of Africa: Food Metals and Towns* (London 1993) 512-550; I. Fowler, 'Babungo: A Study of Iron Production, Trade and Power in a Nineteenth Century Ndop Plain Chiefdom, (Cameroon)' (PhD Anthropology, University College: London University, 1990); L. Pole, 'A Ruhr or Rural Industry?: The Scale of Iron Production in West Africa' *Newsletter Museum Ethnographer Group*, 17 (1985) 41-59; Warnier and Fowler, 'A Nineteenth-Century Ruhr', 329-351.

often been constructed as a South-North movement rather than a South-South movement. Even when it is constructed, foodstuffs have not taken center stage yet. Far from the modernisation and modernity paradigm, long constructed on western ideology lenses, the evidence in this article shows that people acted as independent agents or conduits which transmitted new foodstuffs to their remote villages in Africa, taking the Kom people of Western Cameroon Grassfields as a case study.

In perspective, the hypothesis in this article can be rechecked and compared to other parts of Africa and new research agendas can be drawn. : It is of importance to acknowledge that the food that is cultivated and eaten by most African societies, entered Africa a long time ago. Its history needs to be documented and the routes need to be traced. The stories of the heroes and heroines who played important roles in transporting these cultigens need to be written. What has been achieved in this article, is just a tip of the iceberg that invites for further research into the migrations of cultigens in Africa.