

## ***GHI'KI KFAANG : WOMEN, MODERNITY AND MODERNIZATION IN COLONIAL KOM, CAMEROON, C.1920S-1961***

### **INTRODUCTION**

This article focuses on the allure of African women to modernity taking colonial Kom as a case study. It examines how women in the colonial period were subjects and at the same period agents of modernization and modernity. The colonial venture invented the invisibility of women by excluding them from taking centre stage in administration. This was more because colonialism was concerned more with territory than humans. Women were mostly relevant as domestic servants or served in other lowly paid professions. In colonial regimes that were constructed on racist ideologies women were in contact with the colonial system because of sex, and domestic work as well and would further imitate the ways of their mistresses and masters.

Taking Kom as a case study, I use the analytical framework of subjection by Mahmood Mamdani (1996) who points out that the colonial regimes created two categories of citizenship. The first type referred to people who resided in the urban areas and the second referred to the people who resided in the rural areas and were subjects under traditional leadership. Both were subjects under colonial administration. The kernel of this article is to show how women came into the modernity and modernization process which led to social change. What happened when they came in? Below is the synopsis of two informants, Benedicta Neng Young and Elizabeth Ngebo, whose experiences are representative of the allure to *kfaang* women in Kom and therefore buttresses the main argument of this article.

Benedicta Neng Young, was born in 1937. She went to St. Anthony's Primary School, Njinikom, a village in Kom. After completing primary school she went to the Queen of Holy Rosary College; Onitsha, Nigeria. There she graduated from Abakiliki Nursing School. After graduating from Abakiliki, she worked in Cameroon for 8 months and applied and was admitted

into the University Teaching College, Ibadan, Nigeria where she obtained a Diploma in Nursing. Upon completion of her studies she worked with the Cameroon government till she retired in 1998. She was the first woman to own a car in Kom and a medicine store. During her retirement she constructed her own house which appeared 'modern' in Kom.

Another woman and a contrast to Benedicta was Elizabeth Ngebo who was born in 1932. She never went to school because her parents had no money but she admired education. During catechumen doctrine she fell in love with her husband who was the cook of Rev. Fr. Ivo Stockman. When Father Stockman was transferred to Mamfe he took him along. From Mamfe, Elizabeth met him and they both travelled to Jos. While in Jos, Elizabeth worked in a bakery, and her husband was a cook to the colonial administrators. After some few years they went to Lagos. She came home on retirement in October 1978 and opened a bakery in Kom.

The stories of Benedicta and Elizabeth show similarities and contrasts and seem to complement each other. It illustrates the fact that although women generally had the allure to modernity they were of two categories viz: women of newness and women with newness. According to most women interviewed in the field it was gathered that women of newness represented those who crave for newness like going to school, Christianity, freewomen thus internalising *kfaang*. A parallel of this was women with newness which meant simply exploiting the new situation and making use of modernity and modernisation like Elizabeth. Other countless women who could be said to have emulated them because of their *kfaangness* were Fuam, who travelled out of Kom to Victoria (*itinni kfaang-coast*). Quite apart but very similar were the royal wives from Laikom, traditional capital of Kom, who migrated to Njinikom because of their appeal to Christianity in the early years of Christianity. Benedicta who was an epitome of women of newness was also the first woman in Kom to own and drive a car, construct her own house and own a medicine store while Elizabeth who never had the opportunity to go to school also introduced a bakery from Lagos. Their story and other women as well who were enterprising deserve a place in this article. They collectively and individually represented 'new women' *Ghii'ki Kfaang*, or 'elite women'.

In what follows in this article I will show how women in colonial regimes had allure to modernity. The article begins by examining the methodology of data collection and study area. The next section of the paper will examine the conceptualisation of modernity, modernisation and *kfaang*. The third part of the paper examines avenues which the Kom women accessed to appropriate modernity and modernisation

## **METHODOLOGY AND STUDY AREA**

The data found in this article was collected between 2006 and 2011 during my doctoral research. Due to my intellectual curiosity I am embarking on a re-interpretation of that data. The archives found in Cameroon were one of the first repositories that were used although the ‘hotbed of historians’ the archives were quite fractured and disorganised. To fill the gaps which were found in the archival documents, I interviewed informants. Consequently oral traditions became imperative.

The importance of oral tradition, in societies without writing cannot be overemphasized. The information transmitted verbally fills the gaps in the archival sources (Ki-Zerbo, 1990: 3) Although Ki-Zerbo was so particular about oral tradition it should be noted that it has its own limitations which he was careful to point out. According to him, ‘this spoken history is a very frail thread ... which we use to trace our way back through the dark twists of the labyrinth of time’. Vansina (1985: 199), often quoted as the doyen of African oral tradition, concludes his work by stating that ‘oral traditions have a part to play in the reconstruction of the past and that its importance varies according to place and time. It is a part similar to that played by written sources because both are messages from the past to the present, and messages are key elements in historical reconstruction’.

Kom is the study area and it is located in the Northwest Region of Cameroon. It is the second largest Fodom, after Nso, in the Grassfields (Chilver & Kaberry, 1967: 33). It is ruled by a Fon who doubles as the traditional ruler performing ‘quasi-religious’ functions. This

Fondom like others in pre-colonial Africa grew out of conquest and the politics of inclusion and exclusion through warfare which led to the subjection of weaker neighbours. They were dominated by political and social hierarchies based on kinship/kingship and lineages, on social and political status. Kom Fondom is believed to have been founded about the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It includes sub-chiefdoms which were incorporated into Kom proper as 'vassal states' by Fon Yuh (c.1865-1912), the seventh ruler of Kom (Chilver, 1981: 457).

### **'MODERNITY' AND 'MODERNISATION'**

It is relevant to put modernity and modernisation in context to show the role women played in Kom. The historicity of modernity and modernisation seems to be entangled within the European experience which ignored Africa as part of the globe. Modernisation was rooted in post-enlightenment Europe and was defended on the grounds of its change of European society from an agrarian to an industrial one. In all these, its apologists strongly held that such change did not occur in African societies because they were understood to be static and their people were primitive hunter gatherers. Enough literature however exists to show that Africa, especially from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was part of the global processes (Wallerstein, 1986 & 2005; Ranger, 1963; Thornton, 1992). Fundamental to the understanding of modernisation is the fact that for any meaningful change to take place in any society the movement of people, ideas and cultures is necessary and there should be social and political reorganisation of that society.

As the concept, 'modernisation' was justified as a European and North American idea, so modernity is seen as something that was uniquely European. It was carried overseas and imposed on Africans by the Europeans. Broadly speaking scholars have written about modernity from multifarious perspectives (Ferguson, 1999; Appadurai, 1986; Fardon *et al.*, 1999; Geschier *et al.*, 2008; Havik, 2009; Brinkman *et al.*, 2009; Giddens, 1990; Deutsch *et al.*, 2002; Comaroff and Comaroff, 1993). The literature on modernity however, suggests that it is a problematic term and when seen through analytical 'binoculars it is quite slippery ambiguous and vague' (Comaroff &

Comaroff, 1993: xii), because it seems that different societies and communities have their own way of perceiving and understanding the concept which has been largely coloured by being too 'closely connected to western ideologies of universal development'. In other words, modernity can best be understood if we contextualize it in different world societies because there are peculiar ways of understanding and perceiving it. What it means for one society might not necessary mean the same for another one.

To Kom people, modernity is understood as newness and they called it *kfaang*. This modernity, reflected in Benedicta's and Elizabeth's story and those of other women, has to be accepted, translated, interpreted, adapted and appropriated by the people. For Kom people, *kfaang* was not uprooted elsewhere and transplanted into their society. Kom people only accepted *kfaang* because it had relevance to them and their society and, more importantly, it was acquired through their geographical and social mobility. Through the geographical mobility and access to modern things Kom women became the conduits and wires in which *kfaang* passed to enter into Kom. This was because they were able to navigate and negotiate with their different global encounters abroad and at home.

It goes without saying that to anchor *kfaang* Kom people did not have to abandon all their traditions. The hybrid was not something totally new, neither was it totally old. As Ferguson tells us, it is selecting bits of the foreign and blending it with what is indigenous without dramatically disrupting the stability of the society. According to Comaroff and Comaroff (1992: 112) 'new political cultures were born from countless couplings of local and global worlds, from intersecting histories that refocused European values and intentions, thus rerouting, if not reversing, the march of modernity. This great historical process was also instrumental in remaking economy and society at home. As a result *kfaang* was not a zero-sum game, neither was it a 'winner takes all' one. Cross-culturalism and conviviality played a central role for *kfaang* to be understood and accepted in Kom. This meant that spaces were created in the process for the two cultural worlds to survive. *Kfaang* had to be relevant in context. The content of *kfaang* constituted, *ghii ki kfaang*. Most of the carriers of *kfaang* were mobile women and

those who accessed *kfaang* like through education and schooling, Christianity, freewomen and urbanisation became very 'mobile' and this changed their status in society.

The definition of modernity by scholars to mean the same thing to different societies is not confirmed by Kom experience. Kom women experience of *kfaang* as exemplified by Benedicta and other Kom women is different. Although in most circumstances *kfaang* was alien, in origin, it is important to emphasise that to be exposed to it there must be a degree of social and physical mobility. The following paragraphs illustrate how the women appropriated modernising avenues to become modern themselves starting with the church and Christianity.

### **CHURCH, CHRISTIANITY AND *KFAANG* (*NDO FIYINI NI IWO FIYINI KFAANG*)**

The introduction of the colonial church in Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought about remarkable changes. The literature on this subject is relatively legion and does not conclude the contrary (Ajayi, 1982; Markowitz, 1973; Fields, 1982.) By any reasonable standard which Church has been viewed it was a modernising agent which people were attracted to it but very scant attention has been paid to the women agency.

Women the world over are always the first to be converted and Kom women did not hesitate to appropriate Christianity and church in various ways. The church compound was constructed in Njinikom in 1928 by the Mill Hill fathers. Initially, those who were converted became known as mission girls and/or mission women. They were 'quarantined' in the mission compound to be groomed towards getting married without breaking their virginity. They were also taught cleanliness and new ways of doing things like sewing, washing kitchen utensils and also the vocations of joining Rev. Sisters in the convent. Dorothy Nteinmusi and Camilla Nghochia 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 now stayed in the convent as convent girls and went back to their homes on weekends to visit their parents.<sup>1</sup>

The role played by the Christian women fitted into the framework of human agency in the propagation of Christianity. One of the fundamental changes which came as a result of the influence of the church as modernity and modernising agent concerned royal women. It could be argued that the church connected the royal women to Njinikom and disconnected them from the palace. The implantation of the church in Njinikom as a modernising agent led to royal women to disconnect and escape the strict regimes at Laikom and liberate themselves from the yoke of patriarchal obligations.

### **ROYAL WOMEN IN SEARCH OF KFAANG**

The church became the cynosure to which women, especially royal women, came to be converted. 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>2</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 Adiensa. She could vividly remember her first dress. It was given to her by Rev. Fr. Leonard Jacobs very early in the morning after mass. These clothes were usually distributed in secret, so as to surprise and woo the would-be convert when they are won. The giving of clothes was a strategy to convert people to Christianity.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Dorothy Nteinmusi, Njinikom, 20 January 2009; Camilla Ngohchia, Foncha Street, Bamenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Helen Andiensa, Wombong, Kom 30 September 2008.

The doctrine of Christianity liberated women from ‘bondage’ since the Christian doctrine largely 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 out of Kom, returned and stood against all traditional mores attached to these women. It has also been shown elsewhere that many royal women, 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 returned migrants, the D.O. for Bamenda, Hunt, claimed that the Catholic Mission in 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, “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... his young wives, have left him to attend the mission church and refused to return to him because of their love for modernity....”<sup>3</sup>

The returned migrants not only represented Christianity but something deeper in their eyes. That was a different type of the romantic aspect which the women never had in the palace. They were accompanied by ‘romantic love’ that was new and attractive to the women. They therefore brought along ‘love of newness’ (*iikong-i-kfaang*). Cole & 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. While the women moved to Njinikom for *kfaang*, they also did so because it created space for them to meet men of their generation to make love.

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 being a Christian (Nkwi, 1976: 160-161; Ndi, 2005). G.V.

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<sup>3</sup>See File No.Cb/1929/2, Annual Report Bamenda Division for 1929 (NAB).

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* (the executive arm of the traditional government) in public. If there was some doubt about it, the ordeal of trial by sasswood would be resorted to....’<sup>4</sup> These incidents however need to be understood in the context of new forms of modernity and modernisation. The women disconnected from the palace to be connected to the church because they saw the advantages of *kfaang*. Those who became pregnant under such circumstances received *kfaang* penis and gave birth to *kfaang* children as the outcome.

### **SCHOOL AND LITERACY (NDOGWALI KFAANG) 1928 TO C.1960S**

Western or Christian missionary education has been regarded as one of the most important transformative forces of African societies. Many scholars have conducted studies in different parts of Africa to support this assertion (Barton 1915: 12; Oliver 1956; Taylor 1978.). That this change was necessarily wholly beneficial is however debatable. But all these works agree in pointing out that missionary education was not only powerful agents of social change but effective too. The mission school is the focus of a case study because in terms of scope and impact and the social change of Kom society, it did more than the Native Authority School (NA), which lasted only briefly.

The missionaries were the handmaids of colonialism and were not much different in their attitudes. Both trained the Africans as auxiliaries to help them in accomplishing their objectives. The colonial rulers needed clerks, messengers, drivers, office boys while the missionary needed teachers, catechists, interpreters, carpenters, bricklayers, and cooks to help them in their evangelizing mission. According to Falola (2005:15), ‘western education and literacy were an important partnership of Christianity and colonialism in Africa. Both supplied the tools to look at the societies in different ways and to empower the beneficiaries to seek opportunities in the formal sectors of the society. Africans used the skills to improve their livelihood, others used it

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<sup>4</sup> File Ad 2/59/26, Bikom Assessment Report by G.V. Evans, District Officer Cameroon Province (NAB).

to teach'. Chapel and school therefore stood side by side, for learning was universally regarded by evangelists as the door to the church and, as has been widely acknowledged, the missionaries were perhaps the most significant agent of western education in colonial Africa (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1986: 1-22). However it is undeniable that the school denotes modernity, progress and looking forward, which appears the main reason why the British introduced the schools; they hoped to transform the minds of the Africans and so did the church

In 1928, the Mill Hill Missionaries under Rev Fr. Leonard Jacobs opened the St. Anthony's Primary School at Njinikom which became one of the nuclei of education in the Bamenda Grasslands.<sup>5</sup> That school attracted the cream of Kom youth and also many youth from elsewhere in the Bamenda Grasslands who understood the relevance of western education. It started with an enrolment of 89 boys and 3 girls.<sup>6</sup> In 1929 the number dropped to 60.<sup>7</sup> The drop in numbers occurred for reasons that are far from clear. It was due to competition with the NA school which had been opened earlier in 1924. In 1932 the attendance of St. Anthony's School doubled to 102.<sup>8</sup> In 1936 the enrolment was 217. It was raised to a Standard Six School in 1936, making it a complete primary school cycle with a staff that included a woman whose job was to teach sewing, cooking, laundry and hygiene to girls. In 1945 the school was one amongst three Catholic schools in the Cameroon Province with a Standard Six class.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> File No.Sb/k (1933), 2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 6/3/1928 (NAB) Also see Bernard F. Booth, 1996, *The Mill Hill Fathers in West Cameroon: Education, Health and Development, 1884-1970* (Bethesda: International Scholars Publications,): 66-67.

<sup>6</sup> File No.Sb/k (1933)2, Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 6 March 1928 (NAB).

<sup>7</sup> File No. Sb/k (1933)2 Draft Inspection Report Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 9 August 1929 (NAB).

<sup>8</sup> File No. Sb/k (1933) 2, Annual Returns: Catholic Mission School Njinikom, 1932 (NAB).

<sup>9</sup> These statistics can further be found in File No.Cb 1937/1, Annual Bamenda and League of Nations Report, 1937(1937); Cb 1940/1, Annual and League of Nations Report for 1940, Bamenda Division (NAB).

Women attended school in growing numbers. Their number rose from three in 1928 to eight in 1951 as it is shown by the table below.

**TABLE 1**

**The First Eight Girls at St. Anthony's School, Njinikom**

| NAME               | ADMISSION NUMBER | AGE |
|--------------------|------------------|-----|
| Victoria N. Chia   | 941              | 14  |
| Paulina Ndum       | 1059             | 13  |
| Benedicta Neng     | 918              | 13  |
| Rufina N. Fujua    | 1055             | 14  |
| Mary Tosam Yongabi | 1060             | 14  |
| Francisca Chia     | 1058             | 14  |
| Mary Diom          | 1188             | 13  |
| Sophia Kain        | 1327             | 15  |

**SOURCE:** Admission Register (St. Anthony Primary School Archive)

The admission of girls to the school was something new in Kom culture. The founding of Kom in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century was mostly attributed to women. The thinking of kom mind was

that women were best suited to be at home, following their mothers to the farm and taking care of the children. At the onset of Western education in Kom, some Kom men still did not believe that school or western education was for women. The first eight women who went to school reversed that thinking. This explains why not even all the women who appropriated that *kfaang* successfully completed the school course.

Sometimes because of nuptial matters the girl child dropped out from school to marry whoever asked her hand in marriage through her parents. That explains why many girls left school before completing their studies. One of those girls was Theresia Nange Njuakom. She was born at Muloin, another village in Kom, in 1933. In 1948 she went to St. Anthony's School Njinikom and because of her intelligence she was rapidly promoted to Standard Two. She was promoted to Standard Three and subsequently to Standard Four. There was no Standard Four for girls in Njinikom at the time. She continued her education in Shisong. At the end of Standard Four she came home on vacation with excellent results which had promoted her to Standard Five. The news at home was that somebody had come to ask her hand in marriage and in those days, as Theresia claims, that:

once your parents told you that news you were only condemned to accept. ... because of that my education came to an end in Standard four. That was in 1954 and in April 1955 I got wedded to Lawrence Wallang. Lawrence was a Catholic School teacher.

The experience of Theresia was further confirmed by other women. For instance, Nyanga Clara and Mary Tosam Yongabi both confirmed that women were not allowed to continue schooling once they had a suitor and a suitor in those days never met the girl directly but rather met the parents of the girl. Once the parents accepted, the girl could not refuse.<sup>10</sup> This was a similar situation amongst Ugandan women and men. In both situations the male folk gradually changed their attitudes.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with Theresia Nange Njuakom, Bochain, Njinikom, 31 July 2008.

In 1951-52, Rev.Fr.Groot, the school manager of St. Anthony's School, decided that girls henceforth were not to attend classes with boys in the same school. The only option for the girls was to trek to Shisong where a separate school for girls was found. The performance of the girls who went to Shisong was seemingly encouraging and the mission authorities responded in 1959 by opening the St. Marie Gorretti's Girls School in Njinikom with Rev. Sr. Assumpta Neiderstatter as Headmistress.<sup>11</sup> It is not clear whether the school for girls was opened in Njinikom because the girls who first went to Shisong had performed well or because the mission had already decided to bring school education to girls in Njinikom. Its limitations should also be noted: the school curriculum that was taught by the Rev. Sister stressed the teaching of domestic science to the girls, including sewing, tailoring and cooking which at the time was seen as a top priority for girls by the missionary and the colonial government.

The aspect of the girls trekking to Shisong needs further explanation. First and foremost, this is because it is often stated in the literature that women's geographical mobility came much later than that of the male (Clifford 1992). Scholars have studied the mobility of women as independent agents in Africa (Barnes, 2002; Both, 2000.).Crucial to the theme of this article, women trekked and covered long distances because of their allure to modernity which the school was only a representative.

The long distance was bridged by opening another schools for girls.In 1959 a girls' primary school was opened in Njinikom, St. Marie Gorretti's Primary School. The population increased steadily from 55 in 1959 to 200 in 1960.These figures suggest that the minds of those who attended this school were shaped by education. Kom was transformed through their activities. Besides classroom teaching, a domestic science centre was opened in 1961, headed by a Rev. Nun, Sr. Mary Theresia. The centre was charged to teach girls sewing, knitting, cooking,

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<sup>11</sup> File cb 1958/1 Bamenda Division Annual Report for 1958 ending.

domestic activities like keeping the environment clean, basic hygiene, and womanhood, to name just a few.<sup>12</sup>

One result of education in Kom was the creation of a new social hierarchy consisting of teachers. They constituted the mould of new women whose rise was due to their appropriation of the school (Ajayi, 1965. ). Their mental horizons were widened. They also stood out as the social purveyors of *kfaang* in society. The social mobility of teachers and of those who attended school implied great social change in Kom society. The education of these people, which helped them to further impart knowledge to others, seemed to amount to fundamental change in the nature of Kom society. An example of the female teacher was Mary Tosam Yongabi.

### A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Mary was born in 1935. She went to St. Anthony's School in 1945. In that year many girls entered the same class and so the authorities started thinking about opening a school for girls separately. In Standard Four she continued her education in Nso like Benedicta. After obtaining her Standard Six Certificate in 1955 she continued to St. Francis Teacher's Training College, Fiango, Kumba. After completing her Standard Six and Teacher's Training College, Fiango, she taught in Babanki from 1959 to 1961; Oku 1961-1964 and Njnikom from 1965-1968; Fuanantui from 1968-1975; Tinifoinbi from 1979-1980 and Njinikom from 1980-1988.<sup>13</sup>

The school as a modernising agent first widened the mental horizons of female pupils who later became teachers. Secondly, it influenced their geographical and social mobility. The teachers also represented social hierarchies. They became the carriers and transmitters of *kfaang par excellence*. This type of *kfaang* was based on *gwali* (the book) which was known as *ngwali kfaang* in Kom contrary to Elizabeth's *kfaang* which was based on her, running a bakery. The reasons why after elementary school many of the pupils became teachers was because teaching was very fashionable and prestigious in the 1940s and 1950s.

<sup>12</sup> File Ci (1967) 2 Economic and Social Reports, Menchum Division, 1967-1974 (NAB).

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Mary Yongabi, Bochain Quarter, 13 September 2008.

The school as agent of social change through teachers was also important in facilitating communication by writing letters. Teachers had the magic of using the pen and could write to the D.O. and missionary on behalf of those who could not. They were those capable of shaping the opinions of people by imparting new knowledge. In some parts of French Africa, they were used by the French colonial administration to gather and compile ethnographic information of interest to the colonial administration. Jezequel (2006: 139-158) has demonstrated that the teachers had a lower status when compared to other intermediaries like clerks, but in the colonial landscape where very few career opportunities existed most literate Africans taught and wrote letters for the local folk on the side.

Teachers were the spreader of *kfaang*. They represented all that society needed to progress at the time. They symbolised skill and neatness as writers of letters, the most used medium of communication in the 1940s and 1960s. They also seemed to be paragons of morality and discipline. Finally, they were those who heard, and understood the white man's language and hence worked as translators for the missionaries and colonial authorities. They were thus the measuring rods of the society. And as teachers, they were the first people to put on good clothes, wear shoes and live in good if not luxurious houses. By and large only the elitist few were able to gain access to western education by the end of 1950 but were important to chart the path of Kom towards modernisation.

### IN CONCLUSION

There appears no unanimity on the real gravity of the power of women in African colonial societies even when research has been taken in this direction; it is generally scanty (Allman *et al.*, 2002). This contradiction becomes more apparent when one reads into their role in modernity and modernisation. Researchers so far have taken scant attention at looking at women in the processes of modernity and modernisation. I started this article by first sketching the biography of two women whose allure to modernity showed some striking contrasting features. Although both had different itineraries their allure to modernity was all the same.

The thrust of the article was to position women in colonial Africa using Kom as a case study and their role as admirers and transmitters of modernity. This article contends that women crave for modernity to become modernizers and this was demonstrated in both their physical and social mobility to the coast, Christianity and schooling. Such spaces became scenarios where women were the champions of what was hitherto the men's world. Consequently the women as modernisers strikingly brought to the surface some alterations of gender roles in Kom. With more scrutiny and the use of rigorous historical- anthropological tools elsewhere in Africa, the results might resonate what obtained in Kom albeit parallels.

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