

## **Gender Stereotypes and Labor Mobility in Cameroon**

### **Introduction**

Throughout human history, people have always moved from one place to another for several reasons. Among the motivations for internal or external migration are political, economic, and socio-cultural considerations which may be intentional or unintentional. In all migrations, gender has always played a midmost or peripheral role. Often times when war or civil unrest break out, people are compelled to migrate out of war-stricken zones to those of safety and stability. This movement may be as refugees and many of them are usually women and children. Some people are also forced by a natural calamity like floods, wind destruction, or landslides to migrate to other areas within or without a country. Examples of such migrations are reported of many Southeast Asian, African, and Latin American countries. In general terms, movement of people is determined by either voluntary or involuntary forces which are human, or natural, or both.

Voluntary migration has been due to several reasons. Some people move to take advantage of existing opportunities and improve on their standards of living and their family members back home. This is one of the most important reasons for migration on a large scale from the developing countries of Africa, Latin America, and Asia to Western Europe, the United States, and more recently to China and Japan of Africans. In some cases, the migrants are disappointed because the situation becomes rougher at the point of arrival than the source region. Many of them from Africa are unskilled labor that needs further training to compete in skilled jobs and earn more money. Those who are unqualified for skilled and lucrative jobs do menial work. This category of work is also becoming scarce in the developed world.

In the present circumstances where globalization holds a false promise of improving on the lot of many people through capital flow, the movement of people from one region to another,

especially from Africa and Latin America to the United States and Europe has attracted a lot of scholarly attention. Many scholars of migration have examined the international dimension of labor movement mainly for economic reasons. Others have also discussed international migration from the political and socio-cultural standpoints. The general trend however is that most movements are from the countries of the south to those of the north. They are attracted by the level of technological development and capital investment in the north which are relatively lacking in the south.

This massive out-migration has remained a puzzle to many of the governments of the developing world who need skilled man-power for their own socio-economic development. At the same time receiving economies like the United States, Britain, Germany, Italy, and France are very worried of the massive influx of people from the south and are today enacting legislation making immigration conditions from these regions of the world more difficult. Countries like France are also discussing the use of DNA tests to determine whether an immigrant is related to the person s/he is coming to meet or not. This is humiliating especially to Africans who are migrating to France for better opportunities. Many of them presently living in France and other European countries have gone through very rough moments and in self-defense have organized protests against laws on immigration which they consider dehumanizing. There are also talks about limiting the number of foreign players in the professional football leagues in Europe. If this comes through, then many African and South American players playing professional football in Europe and others willing to move there to play will find it difficult to stay and play the game in Europe.

In the general discussion on migration history, very little attention has been paid to its national character, let alone to its gender phenomenon. More often than not, the tendency is to

conclude that while men often migrate, and women sit back to care for the children and the other members of the household, especially the aged. In some cases, women become part of the discussion on migration only as victims of war with children as refugees. While this chapter focuses on national migration in Cameroon from a historical perspective, it pays attention to the recent increase in the phenomenon of women and girl-children moving from the very thickly populated grassfields region of Cameroon to the littoral quadrant of the country. The factors that have contributed to this phenomenon are carefully examined. The regularity of this phenomenon has come to be known among the grassfielders as “internal bushfalling” meaning seeking for better opportunities elsewhere within the country to assist in the development of self and the family. Many of those who have migrated southwards have done so to exploit avenues for an income to support themselves and their families back home.

### **Concepts and Relevance of Migration**

Different theories have been developed over the centuries to explain the phenomenon of migration in human history. A neoclassical postulation of migration propounded by Ernest Ravenstein in his “Laws of Migration” in 1889 and later expanded upon by other scholars (Ravenstein, 1889; Sjaastad, 1962; Todaro, 1969; Borjas, 1995; Genereux, 2007, p. 10) is a classic push-pull model determined by supply and demand for labor. In this situation, each party tries to maximize income. According to this theory, unfavorable conditions like oppressive laws, and heavy taxation push people to migrate out and favorable conditions in the area of destination pull them.

Another relevant frame of investigation is the world systems theory. This theory examines immigration as an inherent outcome of economic globalization and market penetration

across national boundaries (Sassen, 1988; Massey, 1999). The theory also contends that international migration is a by-product of global capitalism. In this way international migration from the periphery or poorer nations to the core or rich nations is a result of industrial development in the so called First World. The world systems theory like the classic push-pull model also emphasizes the economic factor in determining the movement of people from one part of the world to another. Besides, the cultural theory and social network analyses (Hooghe et al, 2004) have shown that economic issues like labor market and economic incentives are important determinants of migration. The world systems theory thus proves that internal and external migrations are determined more by economics than other forces.

In the family centered frame of analysis Harbison (1981) examines the centrality of the family in the decision of people to migrate. She argues that the family “is the structural and functional context within which motivations and values are shaped, human capital is accrued, information is received and interpreted and decisions are put into operation” (1981, p. 226). The theory places the family at the center of mediation between the individual and society and because of this prioritizes its needs over the individual in many different cases. In many African countries south of the Sahara including Cameroon, the migration of some people from the rural areas to regions of agro-industrial complexes and flourishing business is partly determined by the family by way of providing them financial assistance. This is for usually for prestige and the survival of the family.

For the most part, studies on migration are more or less gender-blind. This has serious implications from both a theoretical and empirical perspectives of migration history and development planning. A few of these theories have however examined women contribution to migration history (Morokvasic, 1984; Chant, 1992; Chant & Radcliffe, 1992; Bjerer 1997;

Kelson and DeLaet, 1999; Adepoju, 2004; Carling, 2005) and some of them have proven that the experience of migratory women has been fundamentally different from that of the men. These few works have also shown that many more women migrate today because of the numerous challenges of the globalizing world like unemployment and the need to accumulate capital for other businesses. Other challenges of the migrants include the craving for family reunions or separation and an increase in mono-parental households. In as much as women migration is said to be fundamentally different from that of men, in some instances they are compelled by similar or near similar challenges like unemployment to move.

No single theory gives an adequate explication to the contemporary increase in the migration of women from the grassfields of Cameroon to the littoral region of the country. A combination of the family and individual decisions, attractive economic opportunities or the lure to meet family members or kin groups for one reason or the other and from one period to another are responsible for their migration from the grassfields most of whom are younger than 30 years. For this study, we have employed a combination of these theories to examine the rapid phenomenon of female migration from the grassfields to the littoral of Cameroon.

Some elderly women move to the coastal region of the country for short periods. Some have migrated there because of health reasons even though some of the best medical institutions like Shisong, Bansa Baptist Hospital (BBH), Acha Tugi managed by the Catholic, Baptist, and Presbyterian churches are located in the area of origin of the migrants. Some of them have often migrated to the coast on the invitation of their children who want them to stay with them and be closely attended to by the doctors under their supervision. Others have and continue to migrate to the littoral of Cameroon to join their children in celebrating an appointment which is a culture in the Cameroon body politic. When appointments are made in Cameroon, there is feasting which

pulls together family members from far and near as well as friends and well wishers. Such movements are occasional but regular because every year appointments are made in different government services in the country. Still others have moved to the coast for a birth celebration, a visitor to accompany relatives to the Douala international airport for travel to Europe or the United States. In our analysis we have employed a methodology of study.

## **Methodology of Study**

The method used in this work is practical and based on social science. The group and individual interview methods were employed in the collection of field data. The people interviewed included retired workers of the Cameroon Development Corporation (CDC) who had either returned home or remained in the southern part of the country upon retirement to earn a living. Those who have not returned home have found it difficult to do so for socio-cultural and economic reasons. Some of them while they worked invested nothing back home. We have also discussed with women involved in inter-urban foodstuff commercialization from the savannah to the forest region of the country. They are among the very mobile groups of the female sex who shuttle from the savanna to the coastal towns of Cameroon and back for trade opportunities.

We also conducted interviews with students schooling in some of the tertiary institutions of learning in towns of the southern region of Cameroon like Buea and Douala. Today, many more girls migrate to these towns because of the pursuit of higher and professional education. This is an important reason for the migration of many young girls from the villages and towns “up country.” They constantly seek for a fortune in education and other attractive opportunities in the south. It is this youthful group that has challenged the pigeon-hole view of the migration of different gender from the grassfields region of Cameroon to the coast in the last 2 decades. Some of them after completing studies have exploited new pathways of business between the south and the savanna where they buy and sell from either region to the other. Such items include crayfish and groundnuts from the south to the savannah and the littoral of Cameroon respectively.

Another group we interviewed included the transporters because they facilitate movement of people from the grassfields to the south and vice versa. Those interviewed included drivers of the travel agencies notably Jean Jeannot, Jeannot, Amour Mezam, Patience, Guarantee, Ton Ton

Express, Tchatcho, Vatican, Mondial, Diamond, Kami, and Moghamo. Besides interviewing them, we also interviewed other workers of these travel agencies like sale agents, loaders, taxi drivers, and the truck boys who carry goods from the parks to different areas. Among these were the young, the middle aged, and the old persons mostly from among the ranks of the drivers. From these interviews, we made observations on the changes that have taken place in the migration history of Cameroon especially from the savannah region of the country to the southern part.

### **Migration in Cameroon**

Since the pre-colonial times, migration in what was then Cameroon was generally from the north to the south. This was a result of the Fulani organised *jihads* from northern Nigeria into northern Cameroon (Njeuma, 1978; Nkwi & Warnier, 1982, pp. 83-88; Ngoh, 1996, pp. 1-6), the transportation of slaves from the hinterland regions of the country to the coast for trans-shipment to the Americas (Fomin & Ngoh, 1998; Ardener, 2002, pp. 125-134), participation in pre-colonial trade with the merchants of trading nations of Europe like Portugal, Holland, Sweden, Germany, France and the United Kingdom (Fanso, 1989, pp. 67-77; Nkwi & Warnier, 1982, pp. 90-91; O'Neil, 1996, pp. 93-94; Ngoh, 1996, 40-44; Ardener, 2002, pp. 125-134). Some of the traders were involved in long distance trade in traditional commodities like palm kernels, mats, and implements from blacksmithing like knives, spears, and cutlasses (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982, p. 49). Hunters were also a migratory people from one place to another because of the search for game. Their migration did not however go beyond the grassfields region of the country.

The early Baptist missionaries set up mission stations along the coast before British colonial rule - notably Victoria (now Limbe) - and migrated from place to place to spread the gospel to people they considered to be agnostic (Fanso, 1989, pp.101-107). The direction of



movement of many people from the grassfields towards the littoral of Cameroon was mostly towards the Cross River basin, the Wouri estuary, and Bimbia (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982; Fanso, 1989; Ngoh, 1996) where European slave merchants carried out trade in different trade items like malagueta pepper, ivory, kernels, slaves, and spices of different kinds.

Migration from the north towards the south initiated during the pre-colonial times has persisted to this day as many people move to the south for different socio-economic reasons. Migration to the north is mostly of workers taking time off to commune with family members at Christmas, Feast of the Ram, New Year's or other religious feasts like Easter and Ascension. Civil servants also travel from the littoral of Cameroon to other parts of the territory annually because of government policy of moving workers from one place to another. Others move to the North as traders to buy groundnuts, onion, and cattle which they supply to the consuming regions of the south. Apart from these reasons and others, it is very unusual for mass movement of people from the south to the three northern provinces of Adamawa, North, and Extreme North because of the distance and the unfriendly sahelian climate.

Most people move southwards because in this zone of the country private business burgeons. Within the coastal region of the country is a concentration of different economic activities like industry, trade, and commercial agriculture. For the distribution of industries in Cameroon according to regions (see Table 1 below).

**Table 1: Distribution of Industries in Cameroon by Region**

<b>Region</b>	<b>Industries</b>
Western	Carving, weaving, pottery, embroidery, smithing and casting, cane work, brass work
Eastern	Timber, groundnut oil mill, mining
Northern	Textile, Groundnut oil mill, local crafts, meat conservation, cement, cotton, leather work, rice
Southern	Cocoa, coffee, tea, oil, flour, sugar, salt, brewery, perfume, fertilizer, match, soap, paint and vanish, compresses gas, cement, metallurgical, boat and ship repair, paper and pulp, rubber and plastic, cigarette, ceramics, textile, mechanical and electrical, footwear and leather, vehicle assembly and repairs

Source: Neba A.S. (1982). *Modern Geography of the United Republic of Cameroon*. New York: Hamilton. pp. 86-92.

From the table above, a majority of the industries are located in the southern region of Cameroon followed by the northern region. Although a good number of industries are located in the western region of the country, most of them are cottage industries which are also very small in size and carried out more or less by individuals and not so much on a commercial scale. Most of the food processing and other few heavy industries operating on a commercial scale and supplying their products within and outside the country are located in the southern part of Cameroon. These are attractions to the population from the grassfields region for the purpose of employment. This has in recent times attracted women from the hinterlands to the towns of this region where they are either directly or indirectly involved in their operations.

Besides, several pull factors facilitate migration to the southern part of Cameroon. These include the low-lying coastal terrain and accessibility to the sea which facilitates contact with the rest of the world. The Douala international airport is also the gateway to Cameroon and an outlet to the rest of the world. The availability of such structures and services especially in the private

enterprise has acted as a magnet for many young girls from the grassfields of Cameroon. On a daily basis over 1,000 people move into the cities of Cameroon most of whom are in the south not to return but to stay there and fend for a living (CRTV Morning Safari, 2007). These major cities include Douala, the economic nerve center of the country.

The main economic activity in the north of Cameroon is cattle rearing and the cultivation of cotton for commercialization in the south and out of Cameroon. The Vina Division of the Adamawa province is the greatest producer of cattle which is supplied to the very large consuming towns of Yaounde and Douala. After Vina is the Donga Mantung Division of the North West Province in cattle production and export to the towns of the littoral of Cameroon and Nigeria. A bulk of the people involved in the cattle trade transport them from the north to the south. Some of their stocks are supplied to customers in neighboring Nigeria, Chad, and the Central African Republic.

The presence of the cotton plantation in the north has not succeeded to pull people from the south to the north because of the distance and cost involved. It takes days on road and the train to move to the northern part of the country. To make matters worse, train services between the south and Ngaoundere in the north are unreliable. Besides, there are more attractive opportunities in the south for labor from the savannah region to the littoral quadrant of Cameroon than to the north of Cameroon. The hostile sahelian climate has been a disincentive to people migrating to the north. Some civil servants sent to this part of the country consider it punishment from the government. While a majority simply stay away and work out their transfer back to the overcrowded south, a few moves up north and after a few years of work ask to be transferred to the south, some of them doing so with fake reasons of ill health. Still others have exploited numerous opportunities in the north which include trading between Cameroon and

Nigeria in African fabric which is produced in large quantities in Ilorin and Abeokuta in Nigeria and supplied throughout the west and central African sub regions. These notwithstanding, migration from the savanna to the riverine areas of the southern part of Cameroon have a long history.

### **Early Migration from the Grassfields to the Coastal Region**

Some of the works related to migration into, without, or within Cameroon (DeLancey, 1974; Clarke, 1974; Nkwi & Warnier, 1982, p. 49; Nkwi, 1987, pp.112-115; Konings, 1993, p. 60; Fonjong, 2006; Ekali, 2006; and Fleischer, 2007) have mainly examined male migration either into the plantation areas for work or trade in salt and other basic necessities. Large scale migration for work and cash to pay for bride wealth (Konings, 1993 p. 60) during the German and British colonial eras made some people stay for a long period of time in the coastal region before returning home. The early phase of migration was largely male biased. Married men did not travel to the plantations with their wives because the colonial administration and plantation owners discouraged this. It was reinforced by the fact that workers needed in the plantations were medically examined and passed fit to perform work. In addition, an authorized labor officer had to satisfy himself that the recruit was not subject to illegal pressure and understood the terms of the contract signed with licensed labor recruiters (Cameroon, 1959, pp. 177-178).

Owners of the plantations at the early phase of labor recruitment thought that this would affect the output of goods and services. Some of the male workers who kept away from home for long periods lost their wives to local rivals. Cases abound in colonial records in the National Archives Buea (NAB) of male labor migration and conflict between the local traditional authorities and the colonial administration over the migration of women to the coastal plantation

areas of Victoria (now Limbe), Muyuka and Tiko in English-speaking Cameroon, many of whom became prostitutes.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of communication infrastructure in Cameroon during the colonial era was problematic and a deterrent to the migration of women from the grassfields to the coast. Trekking on foot from the grassfields region to the coastal plantations was very tedious and long with rivers and forests to frighten many travelers. Even after the roads were traced by the colonial governments from the coast into the hinterlands, these were narrow and winding up and down steep hills and valleys, and did not significantly facilitate movement for long. This was a hindrance to women not only because they were regarded biologically as a weaker but also because other family responsibilities rested heavily on them. These included caring for the young and the old. Women thus stayed back home to care for the children and also cultivate food crops to support their families.

### **Women Migration in Cameroon from the Western Grassfields to the Littoral**

Before and after the independence of the British and French Cameroons in 1960 and 1961 respectively, the migration of labor from the grassfields towards the south was male dominated. Many men from the Bamileke area and other divisions of the North West Province were recruited to work in the numerous bananas, rubber and palm plantations of the coastal belt of Cameroon (see Tables 2, 3 and 4 below).

From the 3 tables below, the percentage of labor force and the total number that worked in the plantations from the colonial to the post independence period rose steadily. In table 2, the

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<sup>1</sup> NAB, File Qe (1926) 2, Labor and Industrial Conditions; NAB, File Qe (1929) 1, Labor Ordinance no. 1 of 1929; NAB, File Qd/a (1932) 11, Plantation Labor Inspections: The General Subject; NAB, File Qd/a (1940) 5, Plantation Labor Inspection: Reports Victoria Division; NAB, File V. 787, Sf 1938/1, Measures against Prostitutes; NAB, File 3337 LG, Sf (1942) 1, Taxation of Prostitutes; NAB, File 929, Sf (1943) 2, Child Prostitution in Lagos 2. Prostitution General; NAB, File 1020, Sf (1941) 1, Traffic in Women to the Gold Coast; NAB, File 730, Sf (1939) 2, Traffic in Girls to the Gold Coast; NAB, File 2374 vol. III, Ca (1942) 1, Provincial Annual Report 1944.

percentage of the labor force from the North West Province working in the CDC plantations rose from 14 in 1926 to 54.4 in 1970. This meant that the labor force from the other areas, notably Nigeria, French Cameroon, Europe, and other African countries, by 1970 constituted only 45.6 percent. From these statistics it is clear that the North West Province alone lost many people who migrated to the coast to work in the plantations.

**Table 2: Composition of Plantation Labor from the North West Province for a Number of Selected Years (Percentages)**

<b>Regional Composition</b>	<b>1926</b>	<b>1941</b>	<b>1950</b>	<b>1960</b>	<b>1970</b>
<b>North West Province</b>					
<b>Momo Division</b>	—	1	9	11.5	16
<b>Mezam Division</b>	14	20	13	12	12.5
<b>Bui Division</b>	—	7	1.5	0.5	0.5
<b>Donga-Mantung Division</b>	—	5	1.5	4.5	5.5
<b>Menchum Division</b>	—	4	7.5	15	20
<b>Total</b>	14	37	32.5	43.5	54.5

Source: Extracted from Piet Konings. (1993). *Labour Resistance in Cameroon: Managerial Strategies and Labour Resistance in the Agro-Industrial Plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation*. London: James Currey (p. 67).

**Table 3: Composition of Labor Force in the Cameroon Development Corporation from the North West Province in 1985/86 (Percentages)**

<b>North West Province</b>	<b>Sample of CDC Labor Force</b>	<b>Ekona Banana Estate</b>	<b>Likomba Rubber Estate</b>	<b>Tole Tea Estate</b>
<b>Mezam Division</b>	14	10	10.5	8
<b>Momo Division</b>	21	21.5	12.5	29
<b>Menchum Division</b>	32	44	23	25
<b>Donga-Mantung Division</b>	6.5	9	28	5
<b>Total</b>	73.5	84.5	75.0	67

Source: Extracted from Piet Konings. (1993). *Labour Resistance in Cameroon: Managerial Strategies and Labour Resistance in the Agro-Industrial Plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation*. London: James Currey (p.68).

**Table 4: Labor Migration from the Hinterlands in 1908**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>Administrative Region</b>	<b>Number of Laborers</b>
<b>Aghem</b>	Wum District	1476
<b>Banyang</b>	Ossidinge Division	597
<b>Bafut</b>	Bamenda District	831
<b>Bali</b>	Bali District	863
<b>Keaka (Ejagha)</b>	Ossidinge Division	1314
<b>Ngie</b>	Ngie-Ngwo District	964
<b>Menemo</b>	Moghamo Area	655
<b>Total</b>		6703

Source: Ndeh Martin Sango. (2006). *The Political Economy of Plantation Agriculture in Anglophone Cameroon, 1884-1961*. PhD Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan Nigeria (p. 143).

In addition, the information contained in the third table is also indicative of the greater percentages of workers from the North West Province who worked in the CDC Ekona banana,

Likomba rubber, and Tole tea plantations. In the case of the Ekona banana plantation, the total number of labor from the North West stood at 84.5 percent, 75.0 percent for the Likomba rubber plantation and 67 percent in the Tole tea estate. In the 3 plantations therefore, the total work force from this province was more than half of the total. This was the situation between 1985 and 1986. The fourth table also presents statistics from the different parts of the hinterlands to the plantations. Apart from the Banyang and Keaka regions which are situated between the grassfields and the forest region, the majority of the labor force came from the present day North West Province.

A few other men were involved in long distance trade carrying with them mats and other items of trade like palm kernels which were sold in Nkongsamba (Afuah, 2006). During the colonial period, Nkongsamba served the purpose of an *entrepot* between the grassfields and the coastal region of Cameroon. It was an important center of coffee trade. Others from Bali, Bangwa, and the Ndop plain chiefdoms were involved in long distance trade towards the Cross River basin of Cameroon. While they sold livestock, palm kernels, brass rods, cloth, and iron products, they bought salt from the salt springs of this region (Nkwi & Warnier, 1982, pp. 49; Kah, 2006, p. 5). The nature of goods involved and the distance covered on foot made it difficult for women to take part in long distance trade.

Besides, the recruitment policy of plantation owners discouraged women migration to the plantations. The usual practice was for licensed recruiters to recruit workers for the plantations by taking into consideration the age of recruitment and other conditions which included advance wages, families of recruited workers, medical examination, measures for acclimatization and adaption, expenses of the journey to the place of employment, and the repatriation of recruited workers and their families (Cameroon, 1959, p.177). These measures notwithstanding, many



women were unenthusiastic because of the role they played in their families and the planters also discouraged the migration of women to the plantations because it was a source of distraction to the male workers. The women might also have been frightened by the force government soldiers and station messengers used in recruiting labor as well as the high death rate of those who came to the plantations (Keller, 1969, p. 35; Eyongetah et al, 1987, p. 73). At this very early phase of colonial migration men formed the majority of labor in the plantations. The only plantation that attracted women to work as pluckers of tea was the Tole tea plantation established near Buea. Still then, the CDC opened other tea plantations in Ndu and Djuttisa in the grassfields which attracted the women of the grassfields to stay back and work in these plantations.

Many years after, the interplay of several factors led to the migration of women from the grassfields towards the coast. This became a challenge to the long held view that while men move women remained at home to handle domestic chores. During the 1980s there was a global decline in economic activities due to the debilitating economic downturn, and the traditional economy in the grassfields of Cameroon was severely overwrought. Coffee which hitherto was a great income earner witnessed a slump in its price and many people destroyed the coffee trees for food crops like cocoyams, bananas, and maize (Kah, Forthcoming). Some of those who faced difficulties in readjusting to the changes in family income because of a fall in the price of coffee migrated towards the south for other economic opportunities. Among this group were many women, especially unmarried and single mothers. (Dorothy, 2004). Today some of the younger girls have been recruited as house girls in the homes of some wealthy Cameroonians in the south and their services are unfortunately abused as is the case in Botswana and the southern African region discussed by Nyamnjoh (2006, pp. 142-227).

This change in the gender pattern of migration has come to stay. Some of them have seized trade opportunities in pepper, skins of cows, garri, yams, Irish potatoes, fish, corn, beans, dry meat, achu spices, okro, groundnuts, and vegetables and sell them to waiting customers in the towns of Douala, Limbe, Tiko, and Kumba in the early hours of the morning every day. Many university students from the North West Province buy and sell foodstuff which makes them move from the supplying regions of the North West to the consuming region of the littoral of Cameroon. (Delphine, October 23, 2007). Through this holiday business they raise enough money to secure their school needs.

The trade in different items has contributed significantly to the migration of women from the grassfields of Cameroon to its littoral. Many women purchase goods such as Irish potatoes, beans, dry meat, spices of all kinds, vegetables, pepper, red onion, and others from the markets of the grassfields of Cameroon and supply them to customers in the towns of the South West and Littoral Provinces (Ngwi, 2007.). Some of the markets for these goods include the well known Muea and Great Soppo markets in Buea, Bonaberi in Douala, and Bonadikombo in Limbe. Some traders buy cows in Bamenda, salt, smoke, and transport these to women in the South West involved in the sale of achu, a popular Cameroonian dish prepared from cocoyams into pounded form and served with red soup (Christy, 2007). Others buy spices of different types and qualities and sell them to these customers (Ngwi, 2007; Christy, 2007).

Many of these women traders in food items contribute to their family incomes through this trade. They assist their husbands in the provision of basic needs at home during this period of economic pinch. Others who know that business thrives in the southern part of the country have moved and established gainful business ventures. This has however not all been a bed of roses because those who have not invested in the right business have lived to regret it. For those

of them faced with this situation, some have taken to the cultivation of crops on the fertile soils of the coastal region for sale (Agnes, 2007). Others have provided education to their family members through the cultivation of food crops which are in high demand in the economic city of Douala.

The global flow of capital has led to heavy investment in the brewery industry in the metropolis of Douala and this has provided opportunities for the young girls from the grassfields to seek temporal employment as sales girls or advertisers of different brands of beer and other products (Ngie, 2007). Some of these brewery industries like *Union Camerounaise des Brasseries*, *Brasseries du Cameroun* and Guinness Cameroon S.A. with headquarters in Douala are making big business due to the high consumption rate of alcohol by Cameroonians. Added to football and music, drinking is worshipped and adored at any time of the day and is a religion in the country.

Many young girls are serving as advertising agents of the brewery industries. When recruited, they are taken to Bafoussam in the case of *Brasseries du Cameroun* for lessons in advertising. After these lessons they are sent to the field to perform and help increase the profit margin of the company. They get into popular drinking spots in mini-skirts and advertise a particular brand of beer chosen by the company at a particular time. Some in the process also advertise themselves. Many young boys eager for a date with some of these beautiful and carefully selected girls frequent these drinking spots. The advertising industry including the mobile telephone companies of Camtel, MTN, and Orange has provided temporal and permanent employment for girls many of them from the grassfields of the country. It has attracted some to make a permanent move to the coastal region not to remain as advertisers but to use this as a stepping stone to other employment avenues or prostitution with business tycoons who have

come to be known as *Mbomas* because of their lavish expenditures on young girls or “sweet sixteens.”

The proliferation of business and industry in the coastal towns like Douala has attracted many girls into the area from the grassfields to become sex workers in some celebrated night clubs (Abong, 2007). This is a paradox considering that AIDS which is a killer disease has not frightened them into giving up this oldest profession in the world. Rather, many of them learn new ways of handling men using the male and female condoms in order to make ends meet. Many of them including university graduates without jobs have become prostitutes in Douala, Tiko, Limbe, and Kumba. Their popular areas in Douala and Limbe are the New Bell and Church Street neighborhoods respectively. When the bush fallers and other tourists are in town, these women set traps to get them to their side in the favorite night clubs like Calypso in Limbe. The end result is that they are taken to bed and paid some money for the service rendered.

Many of these girls are incriminated in big business in the sex industry the risk notwithstanding. This is done with ease because taxes are not paid to government by lewd women as is the case in Europe. Some of them have been hired by other business women of the grassfields resident in the south for the sexual gratification of their customers in the night clubs and receive a commission for this (Dorothy, 2005). A majority of those who fall in this trap are the younger girls perilously in need of partners to keep live moving. They are carefully positioned at the inlets to big hotels in town or in night clubs and other such drinking spots where they lure customers to bed and get away with money. Many of them dance naked in Buea, Limbe, and Douala to charm customers and make money at the end of the day. While the sex industry is composed of many girls from different ethnic groups including those of the forest region, a majority of them in the city of Douala are from the grassfields. From this activity, they

pay house rents and also have something to eat. Some of them also do this to take care of their younger ones living with them or back at home (Miriam, 2007). They are in fact internal ‘bush fallers’ to their families within Cameroon so to speak.

There is also an increasing movement of women from the grassfields to the coast for the hairdressing industry. Many of them have learned the trade in areas like Bamenda which has empowered them to move out and establish themselves in the coastal towns. This is because hairdressing pays more in the coastal towns and in Europe than in the grassfields where business is slowed down by beggary and the deficiency of viable industries. There is what we may call a nursery of hairdressers in the town of Bamenda behind the main market where a good number of women are trained as hairdressers not only for Bamenda and other towns of the North West Province but for the coastal towns and the western world (Ndenge, 2007).

Some of the women who have moved down south have done so to facilitate the garnering of documents for travel to South Africa or Europe where hairdressing is a paying venture. Some of them who moved to the littoral of Cameroon succeeded to travel out of the country while others successfully set up business in the towns of this region where they have raised money to pay for the education of their children and family members as well as construct houses at home. The increase in the movement of many of these women to the coast is also a result of poverty in many rural households of the West and North West Provinces of the country.

Other young girls are today settled in Douala, Limbe, Tiko, Buea, and Kumba because they find big business in the sewing industry (Margaret, 2007). This lady who hails from Oshie in the North West Province has successfully established a sewing shop in Molyko Buea where she also trains young Cameroonians many of whom are from her province of origin. Besides, she has enough capital that has frequently taken her to Onitsha and Aba in Nigeria to buy material

which is sold to other seamstresses in Buea. Many other women from the grassfields are encouraged to move to the south because of the need to learn a trade and set up a successful business venture there. After learning the trade, many of them in the sewing industry have established their own sewing shops in the towns of the coastal region and have in turn employed other youths while others become apprentices in these shops.

Many other women engaged in sewing were formerly house girls who were taken to the coast to care for newborn babies. After taking care of these children to maturity, their employers sent them to be trained in a lifework like hairdressing or sewing as recompense for service rendered (Chantal, 2006). Many of these former house girls have become successful business women in the sewing or hairdressing industry. Due to the increase in their business they have solicited the assistance of their sisters from the village to further empower them in these industries. In this way they have contributed towards the fight against mendicancy and lightened the distress of some of the indigent Cameroonians.

In addition, cooking and selling food in the coastal towns is big business to the women involved in it. Many of the women from the North West Province of Cameroon have settled enduringly in the towns of the coastal region to cook and sell food. Although this kind of business is very fussy, it is a good investment because there are always customers. Among these are the many single men and spinsters who live to feed by buying food when they return from work. Today, a majority of women who sell *miondo* (made of cassava) and roasted fish, fruits of all kinds, yams like at the Mile 17 motor park in Buea, and all kinds of foodstuff are all women, many of them from the grassfields region of the country. Since carrying out these activities is very demanding, the women have often sent for their nieces, sisters, and other family members based at home to assist them in the business. Many of these women also tussle for fish in Limbe

from the fishermen to sell to others in the different coastal towns (Therese, 2007). As many female relatives move down south to assist their sisters, the more the population increase in this part of the country.

The increase in the migration of women from the grassfields to the littoral of Cameroon has been due to the search for good fortune in the new Internet and communication technologies (ICTs). Many of them who cannot stand the long period needed to acquire education for its own sake; they have turned to computer training as an alternative which also guarantees a job at the end of training. Although some of these facilities exist in major towns of the grassfields like Bamenda, Kumbo, Foumban, Dschang, and Bafoussam, the cost of training here is higher than in the coastal towns where communication is easier, cost of establishing cheaper and mobility faster (Sirri, 2007). A good number of school dropouts and jobless graduates have relocated to the south to seek a fortune in ICTs. They receive training and eventually become employed as Internet experts in schools, industries, and other services using computers. Others have accumulated money and established cyber cafes which now employ some young Cameroonians and provide opportunities for others.

Other women from the grassfields who move to the southwest or littoral provinces do so for leisure. From heedfulness, many of them are women of the youthful age. They artlessly love sightseeing and learning in the process. The fascination of the coastal environment like the flat terrain, straight roads, and sandy and attractive beaches have been pull factors to many young girls from the rural areas of the North West and West Provinces. Some of them persuade their parents through fake excuses and move with friends to these fascinating areas of the country to swim and play in the sandy beaches of Limbe and Kribi (Delphine, 2007). This is however a temporal type of migration until such a time those other opportunities are detected which attract

permanent residence. It must however be noted that most of those who travel for leisure are graduates from the university who while in the university of Buea and Douala were exposed to this kind of lifestyle.

The regular movement of women from “up country” to the coast is a result of the increasing phenomenon in unfettered parenthood. Some women are not married and are not willing to do so in the name of women empowerment although they keep bringing forth children with different men. When they are unable to provide the basic needs of their kids, they want to change environment and exploit other opportunities to better their lot. They have indeed parted ways with tradition and prefer seeking for employment than waiting for men to provide for them. Others who have separated with their husbands want empowerment by way of some form of gainful employment (Tohnjaah, 2007). If there is an important reason to explain this sudden upsurge in the migration of women from the grassfields to the coast it is the weakening of tradition and custom. In the past women were expected to marry if they were to gain prestige and security but today many believe in self-made security and prestige. They are now engaged in extra marital affairs with men in what has come to be known in the Cameroonian parlance as ‘*deuxieme bureau*’ or second office.

Since women are the “servants of globalization” many of them from the grassfields of Cameroon have migrated to serve families of a higher social status who are in business and the civil service. Since they cannot serve 2 masters at a time, their family and house caring roles have been handed over to other family members or less privileged women in their villages of origin. This is the case among the Laimbwe of the North West Province. Some of the young girls who have left the 3 villages of Laimbwe namely Bu, Baisso, and Mbengkas to serve people of a



higher social class in Douala like bankers and businessmen have ended up selling groundnuts and themselves on roadsides (Monica, 2004).

To successfully migrate from home, they have left their children with their mothers, grandmothers, or other relatives. When in Douala, they occasionally send home gifts of oil, soap, match, salt, and clothing to please the people caring for their children. Similar to what Fleischer (2007) has said of Cameroon in connection with migration out of the country, in the grassfields of the country individuals are buoyed up by their extended family members to move because of the need for them to accumulate money and help in the execution of family projects back home. Among the Laimbwe for instance, the male and female heads of the family encourage their girl children to move so that they can accumulate some money for construction of a good house and the education of family members.

The phenomenon of early marriage has recently contributed to the migration of women from the Cameroon's grassfields to the coastal region. Many children in the entire grassfields are given into marriage when they are still very tender. Many of the young boys who asked the girls hands in marriage are petty traders in the coastal towns of Cameroon. Others are workers with the different companies located in this part of the country. When they have performed rituals associated with the marriage ceremony, they take their wives to the coastal towns where they are residents (Ngie, 2007). In the past this was not the case because the men who went to work in the CDC plantations did not go with their wives from the beginning because the planters did not need them and also because they anticipated an early return to meet them. It was only after they realized that going home was becoming an illusion that they sent for their wives and children. Others simply sent their pictures home to their family members who used them to engage a woman in marriage for them.

Female migration from the grassfields has also been a result of the increasing awareness to raise productivity, pursue tertiary education, and health of the females and their families. Tradition was so strong in the past that western education was not considered important especially to the girls. Many people in the western grassfields like elsewhere in Cameroon did not encourage the education of the girl. She was needed to keep the family together through household work, farming, and other economic activities and not to be educated. This practice lasted for long but with the brilliant exploits of the early girls whose Christian parents allowed them to go to school; the doubting Thomases started sending their children to school. Today many girl children are in many institutions of higher learning in the schools of the south notably the University of Buea (Adeline, 2007). Many of those who have completed studies from these schools have stayed back especially when they secure jobs with the private sector and other parastatal organizations like in the Spectrum Television, Canal 2 International Equinox Television and Radio, and the CDC among others.

Some of the women have migrated to the south because of the search for marriage partners. This is especially the case with young girls who are housekeeping with men to lure these to marry them. In the past people from the grassfields were encouraged to marry from their own ethnic group but today there is inter-ethnic marriages which explains the frequent mobility of women from the grassfields to the forest region (Pandora, 2007). This phenomenon is on the increase and those who have failed to secure husbands have turned to prostitution. Many others are now primary wage earners in domestic and cleaning jobs, child rearing, care of the elderly, and as nurses and hospital aides. Such are occasions that are increasingly attracting women from the grassfields to the coast. They are taking over these occupations from indigenes of the coastal region that have resorted to doing the same in Europe and America. As they serve as bushfallers

out there, women from the grassfields are serving a similar purpose for their kith and kin of the grassfields residents in the littoral of Cameroon.

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter we tried to pry into the motivations for the coexistent increase in the migration of women from the grassfields region of Cameroon to the coastal region. Among the reasons advanced from our inquiry are economic imperatives, socio-cultural factors, and the search generally for better opportunities at home and abroad. We have thus proven that migration nowadays has taken on a different dimension because in gender terms many more women are migrating than was the case before. The more fascinating thing about this study is that it has proven that national like international migration is also a very important area of study in migration history that should be pursued considering the changing global economic situation affecting not only movement across borders but internal migration for different opportunities.

Besides, studies on national or regional migration reveal patterns that should inform government of the kinds of rational policies to embark on for the development of all segments of society and preempt criminality in the urban areas. In this way regional imbalances would be handled with little or no qualms. Besides, the movement of women from the grassfields to the coastal towns has come to affect the family structures of people of this region which needs a detailed sociological investigation and also within the context of the general history of migration. It is also important to note that among those who migrate are women of the younger generation because those of the older generation migrate only for specific purposes and return home soon afterwards.

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