Chapter Four examined the construction of a new motor road linking Kom to Bamenda and its consequences for Kom society. This Chapter focuses on the coming of bicycles, cars and lorries to Kom, and their combined impact on Kom people and social structure. To this end, it argues that although bicycles and lorries reached Kom within roughly a decade of each other in the 1940s and 1950s, and although they each variously facilitated Kom mobility, motor vehicles had the greater impact because they accelerated mass movement of people and goods. The Chapter also argues that the use and ownership of motor vehicles in Kom contributed to enhanced prestige and social status for individuals and groups in the short and long term.

According to Gewald et al. (2009), ‘(...) the motor-vehicle is arguably the single most important factor for change in Africa in the twentieth century, a factor which has thus far, been neglected in research. Yet its impact extends across the totality of human existence; from ecological devastation to economic advancement, from cultural transformation to political change, through to a myriad of others’. Gewald (2002: 257-285) also shows how the introduction of the motor vehicle transformed Zambian society. He describes the various means of transportation in Zambia, from distance and head load, bicycles to the motor vehicle. He examines the socio-economic impact of the introduction of the motor vehicle in Zambia. In another paper he examines the relationship between the motor vehicle, missionaries and mobility amongst the Herero of Namibia. According to Hopkins (1973: 196), by 1940 French West Africa alone had about 10,000 vehicles. The expansion of motor vehicles in the British West Africa was faster: By the 1920s the vehicles imported to the Gold Coast and Nigeria were more than double the number and twice the tonnage of those entering the French colonies. These works provide a good model with which to study the motor vehicle elsewhere in Africa. The works provide snapshots and further lead to us to sharper ways of understanding the history of the motor vehicle in relation to geographical mobility, technology and social change. The Chapter specifically uses Kopytoff’s concept of the ‘cultural biography of things’ (Kopytoff, 1986: 67-91).

This Chapter includes the biography of the vehicle, of the vehicle owner and the family history of those who appropriated this transport technology. What was the relationship between the vehicle as kfaang and Kom society? As with any other technology which when introduced into the society develops a regime around it, so too with the vehicle. What was that regime which developed around the vehicle? As a start,
one can say that the vehicle co-opted a kinship which included those who worked in the vehicle. How was the vehicle accepted, translated and domesticated by Kom people? As a technology, how did it affect the physical mobility of Kom people? How did that particular technology of motor vehicles affect geographical mobility? What did the motor vehicle mean to Kom people and how did they see it? What did the vehicle as a specific technological symbol represent?

The Chapter is divided into five sections. The first section discusses the introduction of the motor vehicle to Kom; the person who bought the vehicle and the network in which he was involved. The second section examines the vehicle and its depiction, while the third discusses the ‘domestication’ of the vehicle by Kom people. The fourth section examines the sitting arrangements and running commentaries of the passengers, while the fifth part examines the impact of the motor vehicle on Kom society with particular attention to the creation of new social hierarchies and mobility which developed around the vehicle.

The motor vehicle in Kom

In June 1955, the first motor vehicle, bought and owned by a Kom man, James Nsah Neng Ndai, entered Kom amidst great fascination. The fascination was not so much because it was the first time that a motor vehicle had entered Kom but because it was a Kom man who had bought the vehicle. The lineage of the owner, *titinalah*, celebrated this achievement by one of their illustrious sons with a group photograph.

James Nsah Neng Ndai was born in Kom around 1913. He was the only son in a family of five girls. To escape the pressure of being responsible to his nephews he migrated to the coast where he anticipated earning money. His decision to move was because Kom is a matrilineal society in which uncles and not biological fathers own the children. The belief is that only women know the true fathers of the children (Nkwil & Warnier, 1982; Vubo, 2005: 145-182). The role of the father is to provide farm land for the wives, and a piece of land on which the male children can build their houses. Because of this fact Ndai decided to go to the coast to earn money and accumulate capital for desirable commodities.

He moved in the late 1930s to Kombone village in Kumba Division. As the first Kom man in Kombone, he acquired farm land on which he cultivated coffee and cocoa in large quantities. As the farms became larger he started employing labour and eventually had a labour force of more than thirty people. He bought his Austin lorry in Lagos in 1955. Lagos at the time was the economic capital of British Southern Cameroons because the British administered that territory as part of Nigeria. He died in 1998 and was buried at the Njinikom Catholic mission cemetery because he was a Christian and it is believed in the Christian circles that when a Christian dies he should be buried in the church cemetery. He was survived by three daughters.

Anna Bih Nsah who was married to James for forty years before his death explained how her husband could buy a vehicle in 1955 in the following words:

I knew my husband just when the missionaries came to stay at the mission, here in Njinikom (1927). We got married traditionally and he took me to the coast to a place known as Kombone (...) My husband had seven large cocoa farms and two coffee farms. In those farms he employed about thirty-

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1 Interview with Yindo Mbah, Njinikom, 12 September 2008.
2 Interview with Ayeah Nsom, 24 June 2008, Atuilah, Njinikom.
five people and some of his nephews were supervising the workers (...) Because of that wealth, Kom people around Kombone mission area where we lived became jealous. Oh, it was not only the wealth; he was also influential in many important things since he was a prince (...) he fell sick for a very long time and at one point was taken home for traditional medical help. During his absence, I was in charge of the farms and our children. I was constantly afraid that he would die. I do not know whether he was poisoned or not. In his absence we harvested more than fifty bags of cocoa and coffee. One day he came back to Kombone. It was a great day and everybody in the house was happy. He was also happy with the harvest. In that meeting, he informed us that he would want to sell all the crops harvested, the farms and the house (...) He would use the money, to go to Lagos and buy a vehicle. The vehicle will help Kom people moving out of Kom to distant places. The people will no longer trek. Everybody in the house accepted this proposal. He had so much money from the sales.

(...) one day in the month of June (njong njoinisi) my husband arrived with a vehicle. The vehicle was not what you are seeing now. It was made of plank and had a tarpaulin. The vehicle arrived on the eve of Njinikom market day-Saturday. He presented the vehicle to Kom public on that market day. That day was a great day in Njinikom and the whole of Kom. People whispered that Nsah has done something great; others said that the vehicle was frightening while others vowed that they will never enter it. The next day was a great family feast in the compound with his family and a photograph was taken.

His driver was a Yoruba man. Unfortunately, I have forgotten his name. He did a very bad job because he was not always accountable for the finances of the vehicle. My husband decided to employ a motor boy to be in charge of collecting the money. This man was Boniface Ngoh who was the nephew of his friend, Ambrose Beng, at Kombone. It was at the time of Boniface that we could have meaningful finances. The Yoruba driver left and the next driver was a Kom prince, Marx Nkwain. After sometime, Boniface left for the coast and another motor boy was employed. In the year of Cameroon Independence the vehicle had an accident at the bridge between Bambui and Babanki and was damaged beyond repairs. That was the end of the vehicle.3

The story told by Ndai’s widow indicates that her husband was a wealthy man. He had many cash crop farms. He had workers in his employ. His decision to buy a vehicle was informed by his ill health, from which he recovered. He decided to sell his farms and the house. By buying that vehicle he became the first person to buy a transport lorry in Kom. Consequently, we could contend that to appropriate this medium of technology wealth was one of the pre-requisites. The fact that he had the wealth and labour showed some sort of power.

The story also shows something different from Benedicta’s experience and similar to Anyway Ndichia Timti. The former became important because she went to school while James and Anyway did not, but took a different road. Their status changed like Benedicta’s although their difference was clear, one went to school and the others did not. That might illustrate different ways by which social hierarchies were created.

It is intriguing that he bought the vehicle in Lagos, with the aid of a Kom man, Cosmas Nchouji, who was about to complete studying photography. Nchouji was born in 1919 to William Fulmai who was one of the earliest people to settle in Njinikom. His mother’s name was Nabi Akungha. He finished elementary education in St. Anthony’s School, Njinikom. He obtained his Standard Six Certificate in 1938. After that he went to Tiko where he worked in the plantations for two years. He saved some money and started studying photography. He was not satisfied with his terms of apprenticeship. He therefore migrated to Enugu, Ibadan and finally in Lagos where he completed the profession of photography in 1955. Back in Kom he was the first photographer. He was

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3 Interview with Annah Bih Nsah, widow and wife of James Nsah Neng Ndai, the person who owned a vehicle in Kom, 30th June 2008.
the person who accommodated Nsah in Lagos and first took him to Kom community in Lagos and finally to where the Austin lorries were sold. According to Nchouji, Nsah bought the vehicle for £2,500 in the market for second hand goods at Ikoyi, Lagos. Henry Kini, who by then was the Director of Customs and Ndinyah, an Inspector of Police, all from Kom, helped him with the transaction and to register the vehicle.

The help which was rendered by Cosmas, Henry and Ndinyah to James in Lagos and the short history of James’s history before buying the vehicle might fit into the biography of things develop by Kopytoff. According to him,

The biography of a vehicle in Africa would reveal a wealth of cultural data: the way it was acquired, how and from whom the money was assembled to pay for it, the relationship of the seller to the buyer, the uses to which the vehicle is regularly put, the identity of its most frequent passengers and of those who borrow it, the frequency of borrowing, the garages to which it is taken and the owner’s relations to the mechanics and drivers, the movement of the vehicle from hand to hand over the years, and in the end, when the vehicle collapses, the final disposition of its remains (...) (Kopytoff, 1986: 67-68).

The story of the vehicle may not paint a full photo of its biography but it at least tells some it. For instance, we are at a loss regarding the registration of the vehicle. Who helped in the handover of the vehicle? How did the owner get the vehicle documents? Answers to all these questions might give to us a fuller understanding of the biography of the vehicle.

The vehicle arrived during the period of political activism in the British Southern Cameroon. In the 1950s there was a demand for independence by the British and French colonies in Africa. Kom participated in the ongoing political activism in the territory because it was in the contested territory of the British Cameroons. In 1954 the first indigenous political party, KNC, was established, and a branch was readily formed in Kom with Joseph Ndong Nkwain being its leader. In 1955 the party split and the KNDP was formed with Augustine Ngom Jua being its leader in Kom. So the two major political parties in the British Southern Cameroons had branches in Kom. Technology shows and implies progress in the society so the politics of the region if carefully scrutinised, also shows how the society progresses. The vehicle therefore showed how much of progress Kom people had made. It might have been coincidental occurrences but it is important to see the connection between technology (vehicle) and societal progress in Kom. The vehicle also showed how kfaang or technology was always in the minds of the people as a mark of progress and signified the way forward. The search for independence showed how the people were forward-looking and was accompanied by optimism as people were eager to see a new future. At the same time, the first vehicle bought by a Kom man entered Kom in 1955.

The vehicle and photo

In the field most informants could recognise the people in the photograph and actually confirmed that it was idyi-al, meaning pride or showing o me very proud. Michael Mbeng was one member of the lineage in the photograph who was still ff and that the lineage which was one of the founding lineages in Kom beca alive. According to him the photograph, although meant for the family members, also included people like him because his good friend Kukwa was a member of the Itinilah lineage. He further

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4 Interview with Cosmas Nchouji, 89 years, Njinikom, 17 September 2008.
claimed that on that day many of the people of that lineage could be heard saying aloud that the vehicle belonged to the family and members of other lineages who wanted to have their own vehicle should make friends with them. The story narrated by Michael was repeated by Cosmas Nchouji, the photographer, who was part of the lineage. He went further than Michael and said: ‘Kom people could be heard all over Kom area saying that Nsah has bought their vehicle which will save them trekking. Most people, believed and felt that the vehicle was for Kom (…).’ Like Fuh (2009) who has demonstrated how prestige was manifested and experienced in Old Town Bamenda among the youths, the people in Kom gathered in the photograph and from the oral sources gathered so far, showed that it was more for prestigious reasons.

The meanings associated with the vehicle by the majority of Kom people indicate that they shared almost the same view of the vehicle. It was not only the members of the owner’s lineage but also other lineages who felt that the vehicle belonged to them. Regarding that type of reasoning Pinch & Bijker (1989: 30) have stated:

The key requirement for social construction of technology is that all members of a certain social group share the same set of meanings attached to a specific artifact. In deciding which social groups are relevant, we must first ask whether the artifact has any meaning at all for the members of the social group under investigation. Obviously, the social group of consumers or users of the artifact fulfills this

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5 Interview with Michael Mbeng, Njinikom, 14, 15, 16 and 21 September 2008.
6 Interview with Cosmas Nchouji, Njinikom, 25 September 2008.
7 Ibid.
requirement. Another question to be posed is whether provisionally defined social group is homoge-
nous with respect to the meanings given to the artifact.

It is not important here to search for the homogeneity of the group. But if we take
these scholars seriously, it means that the artefact which to Kom was kfuang was
accepted and made relevant in their context. We could therefore also contend that the
photo was a symbol and measure of prestige and status. The people valorised the
vehicle because they saw it as something which would facilitate their geographical
mobility. It would save them from trekking.

The next photograph (Photo 5.1) is from the family album of the widow of James
Nsah and it has been reproduced here with the permission of the family. Sitting in the
middle with a long white hat and putting on sandals with socks is the vehicle owner. To
his left hand is his wife and their three little children. To his right is a Catholic monk,
Rev. Brother Denis Ngoh. To the left of his wife is Joachim Ngwiuh, his father-in-law.
The other people in the photograph are his housemaids and relations. This photo was
taken when he officially got married in the Roman Catholic Church. The photo was
taken in front of the parish office and from the way the vehicle owner is sitting in the
photo one can guess that he was a rich man. Of course it was because he was rich that
he bought a vehicle. Appropriating a particular kfuang, technology therefore is power.
His power is shown in that photograph and his interaction with the church. This is quite
symbolic because the Catholic Church was another element of modernisation and social
change in Kom.

![Photo 5.2](image)

*Photo 5.2* The vehicle owner and his ‘family’

*Source:* From the collection of Nsah’s album
Scholars over the years have attempted to define the meaning of ‘domestication’. Barker et al. (2005) argue that ‘domestication’ is a process in which a technology changes its status from outrageous novelty to an aspect of everyday life which is taken for granted. Van Binsbergen and Geschiere (2005: 9-48) maintain that a domesticated object is a part of the physical world that has been defined, classified and appropriated by humans. Latour (1987) demonstrates how social context and technical content are both essential to a proper understanding of technology. That approach was later re-formulated by Lehtonen (2003), who described the initial period of living with new technology and the way the technology needs to be fitted into pre-existing technological and human relationships. Pantza (1997) referring to social history considers how various technologies are domesticated and relevant in everyday life. Geschiere & Rowlands (1996) also demonstrate different trajectories in which modernity could be domesticated. Smits (2006) and Schank et al. (1999), elaborate on the taming of technology in the daily life of human societies.

In general, the above scholars see ‘domestication’ as an approach that describes the processes by which innovations, especially new technologies, are appropriated by users, and are integrated into everyday life and adapted to daily routines. Kom did this with ‘their’ vehicle. Domestication is thus both the practical and the symbolic adoption and use of technologies in which these two elements – the meaning of things, and their materiality – are also important in the understanding of how technologies become part of everyday life. This section pays attention to the motor vehicle as it was domesticated amongst Kom people.

The coming of the motor vehicle as described by Cosmas was totally rejected by some people who were frightened of it. These people also rejected the first camera which he had introduced to Kom from Lagos in 1954. According to him there was a ‘wild’ rumour circulated by some detractors that if he photographed someone, and previously the person would have lived for another five years, after being photographed the person would only live for two. He concluded by saying that he did not blame the people because they were simply ignorant.8 He then migrated to Ndop, a neighbour of Kom, where he established a photo studio. With the formation of the KNDP in August 1955, he was employed as the party photographer to take photos of Fons in the Bamenda Grasslands. It was only then that people became less suspicious of photography. Just as people became frightened and suspicious of photography so also was the case with the vehicle. Cosmas also claims that a minority of people spread rumours about the vehicle. According to them it could cause madness because of its speed which ‘caused their brains to be turning’. The step in photography and vehicle illustrates how a technological artefact or kfaang could be rejected outright by people who did not see its relevance and usefulness. The Kom therefore found it difficult to appropriate a camera because they had never understood it. The vehicle was different because only a minority rejected it. Overall, it shows how kfaang could only be appropriated when it was relevant and understood by people.

Further appropriation of the vehicle was demonstrated in the names Kom gave the vehicle and its parts. The motor vehicle produced a sound which was similar to a

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8 Interview with Cosmas Nehouji, Njinikom, 15 June 2007.
A carpenter bee known in Kom language as *afu’em* – a carpenter bee. This bee could be very destructive to the roof of a house because it bores holes into the timber rafters. It stings but also produces honey. The *afu’em* metaphor therefore suggests Kom understanding of the vehicle. Since the sound produced by the vehicle was similar to the *afu’em* Kom decided to call it *afu’em a, kfaang*, meaning the carpenter bee of newness. The carpenter bee also produce honey and at the same time stings. The vehicle by the same token is quite ‘sweet’ for lack of a better word. The fact that the bee also stings can be noticed from the way the vehicle had an accident as we have been told by the widow of the vehicle owner on the eve of Cameroon’s independence.

Furthermore, other parts of the vehicle received more appropriation from Kom. The accelerator was known as *nyoh-na-fa,ah* which meant ‘lighted with the foot’ since the car was accelerated using the foot. In parts of Central and East Africa vehicles were likened to vampires by the people, perhaps because Christianity had not struck roots into the places but more because in their midst vampires were like the first motor vehicles in terms of their speed. The motor vehicles were also likened to vampires because of the colour red. Vampires were used to sucking blood which was red. The colour of the petrol was reddish (White, 1997: 436-460). The parallel of this today is seen in the way many societies in Africa and Bamenda Grasslands have come to label the mobile telephone. To Kom it is *ficha fi kfaang* (the wire of newness). The significance of such naming is that people almost immediately know how to construct these technologies to best suit them and their environments. Today it is interesting to see people repairing cell phones as in the years past they repaired vehicles without any formal training.

The history of foreign objects as narrated by Nsah’s widow approximates what Kopytoff (1986: 67) calls the biography of things. According to him ‘Biography of things can make salient what might otherwise remain obscure. For example, in situations of culture contact, they can show what anthropologists have so often stressed: that what is significant about the adoption of alien objects – as of alien ideas – is not the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use ... Following the Kom experience, the car was adopted with various alias names that were given to it.

In addition to these local perceptions, Kom people christened the vehicle *chimambom*. This meant ‘God should guide me’, an instance of the impact of Christianity which entered Kom fully in 1927. According to Nsah’s widow the epithet was evidence that her husband did not feel secure among his people, and because he had been sick for a very long time that was why he accepted the name. The aliasing of the vehicle as such received shaper parallel in Mankon. Here when the Fon of Mankon, Ndefru, began the business of supplying food to the Bamenda prisons he bought a vehicle in 1938 and called it *Aghanwi* (God’s Gift) Fo Angwafor, 2009: 6). Those who were the first to own vehicles in their localities were prone to dedicate the vehicles to God. Writing his autobiography, Fo Angwafor, maintains that ‘we name the lorry *Aghanwi*; we were the first people to own a lorry in the whole of the Bamenda region at the time’ (Fo Angwafor, 2009: 6). The naming of vehicles with a particular focus on God has also attracted scholarly attention in West Africa. Writing about the inscriptions on vehicles in Ghana, van der Geest (2009: 253-293) argued that these inscriptions were literary but at the same time metaphorical. They contain information

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9 Interview with Adiensa Helen Nsah, Njinikom, 30th May 2007.
of all sorts and tell the history of the vehicle owners and their families and other people. The religious significance of the inscription on vehicles shows how man struggles to offer to God what he thinks he cannot control as well as what he thinks signifies goodness and progress. In Ghana, Verrips & Meyer (2001: 152-184) have studied ‘The God Never Fails’, the vehicle that belongs to Kwaku. Therefore what was going on in Kom and Bamenda Grasslands was paralleled elsewhere in Africa as the Ghana example illustrates.

From the above, it could be said that for any type of technology to make an impact in a society the people have to adopt and adapt it to their needs. They have to tame the new and ‘wild’ technology by conferring familiar names from their history and culture. The motor vehicle had just illustrated that perception in Kom. The way people sat and the comments that ran across the passengers were interesting and relevant to us here.

Sitting arrangements and running commentaries

Passengers sat on benches and had to look backwards instead of looking forward as it is usually the norm. People had to climb a few rungs before finally getting their seats in the vehicle because of the way these types of vehicle were constructed. Some scholars have identified these types of vehicles in British West Africa and Cameroon Grassland. For instance, Jordan (1978: 35) observes that

(...) this type of lorry was fashionable in British West Africa in the 1950s. The lorries were built from trucks that were no more serviceable for long distance transport. The floor of the lorry was left intact, the roof closed and lowered and the sides and rear slats removed except those up to a height of about 60 centimetres from the floor. Pieces of the wooden planks were laid across the remaining slats to form benches. People climbed in from the sides and sat facing backward.

Durrell (1954: 12), who was in Bafut in the Bamenda Grasslands in the mid-1940s to collect and study different types of tropical insects describes the vehicle in which he travelled in the following words: ‘The lorry that arrived to take me up to the mountains was worse than any that I have seen before: it tottered on the borders of senile decay. It stood there on buckled wheels, wheezing and grasping with exhaustion from having to climb up the gentle slope to the camp, and I consigned myself and my loads to it with some trepidation (…).’ Jordan provides details of how the vehicle was constructed to accommodate the sitting positions of passengers. Durrell states that the vehicle in which he was to travel had outlived its usefulness. The vehicle in Kom therefore did not differ greatly from its counterparts elsewhere in British West Africa.

With regard to the sitting arrangements, the way people sat in the vehicle was far from being normal but it also depended on the way the lorry was constructed. It took energy out of people to climb into the vehicle. Inside the vehicle people had to sit with their luggage consisting of goats, tins of oil, bags of corn, chickens and boxes of dresses. They sat so that their chins touched their knees. One of the people who travelled with the vehicle was Bartholomew Nkwain. He was born in 1944 at Njinikom, He underwent his elementary education in St. Anthony’s School, Njinikom, and in 1964 travelled to the plantations. From the plantations, he went to Kumba where he worked with Brasseries du Cameroun till 1990 when he went on retirement. According to him, Chimambom at one time could vehicle more than 20 people. These people were carried along with goods which included goats, salt, kerosene, cigarettes and palm oil. So people were not separated from the goods as it is today. When the lorry was running two things were noticed: the first thing was that
you could quickly notice those who had entered the lorry for their first time in the commentaries they were making. Most of the time, they were complaining that they could see objects passing very quickly. Some were vomiting and this showed how it was their first time to enter the vehicle. The second issue was that whenever the gear was to be changed one will hear the driver shouting ‘we-dg-e’. The motorboy who had a piece of wood will place it behind the tyres. As the lorry was climbing he will be running following the vehicle until the lorry will finish climbing the hill. Oh, I forgot another one. You will hear the elderly who used to trek to Bamenda frequently pointing at places where the footpaths existed. This was to show off that they were not going to Bamenda for their first time but that they knew where they were going. Now those who were going for the first time will immediately create some friendship and while in Bamenda they will be directed to where they were going. The sitting positions were interesting. Those who sat in front with the driver paid differently and higher amount than those who sat behind mixed with goods but paid lower.10

From our informant, the sitting arrangements also reflected status. Those occupied the front seat with the driver had to pay a higher fare than those in the ‘popular’ section. For instance, if the transport fare to Bamenda was £2 then the person who opted to occupy the front seat of the vehicle paid an extra £1. The collector sat by the door with a bag tied to his waist to collect fares from the passengers. Then there was the popular side in which people sat with their goods and barely squatted on the benches with their chins resting on their knees. There were benches which carried averagely about eight people per bench. There was no carriage and so all the goods were put inside the vehicle. The motorboy (tīghībī moto meaning the dog of the vehicle) now was the last person sitting on the tail board of the vehicle. The African playwright, Soyinka (1965: 4), has captured the sitting arrangements. According to him while in the vehicle the passenger turned his back to where he was coming from.

The most frequent commentaries came from two categories of passengers: Those who were entering the vehicle for their first time and those who were already used to the footpaths on their way to Bamenda. Those people who entered the vehicle for their first time were singing mostly church songs while the vehicle was in motion. Those who had been to Bamenda by footpaths were heard and seen pointing the paths which the road had deviated – the places which they used to move on foot and also places which they rested while trekking to Bamenda. Amongst these two groups of people were also people who did not know their way in Bamenda and they needed the driver or motor boy to direct them.11

The motor vehicle in society

This section attempts to examine some of the consequences of the introduction of the motor vehicle into the society. To say that the vehicle accelerated geographical mobility is to state the obvious. But it will not be too obvious to state the effect of geographical mobility in relations to trekking. Motor vehicles made it possible for geographical mobility to increase. The plantations in the coast of Cameroon attracted labour which was recruited from the Grasslands, including Kom. After the defeat of the Germans in Cameroon in 1916 the CDC was established as a statutory corporation by a Nigerian government ordinance in 1946 to operate former German plantations, mainly in Victoria and Kumba Divisions.12

10 Interview with Bartholomew Nkwain, Atuilah, 64 years, Njinikom, 24 June 2008.
11 Interview with Ngong Tim, Njinikom, 19 June 2008.
12 CO 936/418 International Trusteeship Affairs in British Cameroons (PRO).
These plantations attracted many people from Kom who travelled there to seek employment opportunities. Konings (2001: 174) has studied the plantation economy in Cameroon and has provided revealing statistics regarding labour from the Bamenda Grasslands from 1926 to 1990. Between 1956 and 1959 there were 3,722 Kom people in the plantations (Ardener et al. 1960: 204-205)\(^{13}\) in a labour force of 43,000.\(^{14}\) It is not clear as to how many people from Kom were already in the plantations before the vehicle was introduced but it seems very possible that the increase recorded between 1956 and 1959 can be attributed to the motor vehicle which was largely responsible for the increase in geographical mobility.

Another impact of the motor vehicle fell on carriers who were employed to carry the load of government officials on tour. Kom people were prominent among numerous carriers in the British Southern Cameroons. The D.O. for Bamenda, G.V. Evans, stated that: ‘great eagerness has been displayed during the last two months for carrier work which is a good sign at least that the work is purely voluntary. To give only one example, 80 carriers were required from the Fon of Bikom and 120 arrived and the rejected ones were upset at not being selected’.\(^{15}\)

The next report showed the impact of the vehicle on the wages of carriers. The employment of the carriers’ wages that were charged in carrying the luggage of the government officials became a matter of concern to the British colonial officials in the British Southern Cameroons. On 17 August 1955, the Acting Commissioner of Southern Cameroons, R.R. Cordale, wrote to the Resident of special Duty in Bamenda:

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From P. 649, No. 91.49/614, Commissioner’s Office, Buea, Cameroons, Under UN Trusteeship, 17 August 1955

To:
The Resident, Special Duty, Bamenda
The District Officer, Wum,
The District Officer, Nkambe
The District Officer, Mamfe
The District Officer, Kumba,
The District Officer, Victoria.

Continues on next page

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\(^{13}\) Cameroon Development Cooperation, Annual Reports, 1956-1959 (CDC) also vehicle very important statistics and were produced annually by the management of the corporation. In the years 1956-1959, these figures were often produced in December showing the total number of labour and from which tribe it came from. This exercise seems to have started petering out when the British Cameroon joined the French Cameroon in October 1961. Reasons are still unclear.

\(^{14}\) CO 936/412 International Trusteeship Annual Reports for British Cameroons, 1957-1959(PRO).

\(^{15}\) Report on the Bamenda Division, Cameroons Province for the Quarter Ending, 30 June 1923 by G.V. Evans, (NAB).
The implementation of wages to carriers was not the normal practice. Usually the labour to carry the goods of the government officials was supplied by the chiefs. With the introduction of the motor vehicle it was not possible for it to reach all the corners of Southern Cameroon or better still where the government officials could reach. It therefore became incumbent on the colonial administration to adjust to the growing need of transporting the goods of their governors on trek. Consequently, it was necessary to adjust the wages of the carriers. From the letter above it is illustrative enough to show that the wages were not uniform enough. In the Victoria, Kumba, Mamfe areas where the motor vehicle was first introduced, the wages were slightly different from those of Bamenda, Wum(Kom) and Nkambe area which were much larger and had a difficult topography.

To show the effect that the introduction of the motor vehicle had on carriers, one year later the Commissioner of southern Cameroons wrote another letter No. 2145/626 titled ‘Carrier rate’. He wrote in the following words:

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CARRIERS RATE

As a result of the decision, on the 9th May 1955 of the Executive Council to adopt the recommendations of Southern Cameroons Wages Committee, it has become necessary to adjust the rates of pay of carriers.

2. With respect from 1st May, 1955, the rates of pay will be set out in the schedule below:

(Sgd) R.B. Cordale for the Commissioner of Southern

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Labour group</th>
<th>Carrier rate/uploaded</th>
<th>carrier rate/loaded</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>2/10d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>6</td>
<td>2/5d</td>
<td>2/10d</td>
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<td>2/16d</td>
<td>2/20d</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wum</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1/7d</td>
<td>1/10d</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nkambe</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1/7d</td>
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The Resident, Special Duty, Bamenda
The District Officer, Wum
The District Officer, Nkambe
The District Officer Mamfe
The District Officer, Kumba

CARRIERS RATE

I refer to my letter No. 9149/614 of 17th August 1955. Since the revision of the General and Special Labour Grade Rates with effect from 1st April, 1966, it has become necessary to adjust the carrier rates for the six divisions.

2. With effect from 1st April, 1966, these rates are as follows:

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16 File No.F. 150 Rc/e1947/1, Government vehicles, use charges and Careers (NAB); For the original letters see appendix I.
The figures in the report miss out one point. They treated carriers without making mention of Kom which was found in the Bamenda Division. During the fieldwork it was testified that some Kom worked as carriers. One of them was Janarius Ngontum. He was born in February 1922, and he used to control a carrier gang of more than 25 people. He claimed that, ‘it was very interesting but at the same time many people were bound to lose their jobs when the vehicle was introduced. Many of the people did not have their normal wages and many of them abandoned the job and went to the plantations.’

If the intention of some technologies was to connect places and people then the introduction of the motor vehicle did just that. The Ngwin falla and the Twang Kwabeilla and Ngwin Mbzingou, places where Kom people used to go when they trekked to Bamenda, Nkongsamba, and Victoria, were cut off since vehicles never passed through such places but took only one of the new roads. The people and the resting points in those places were more connected to the new road. One of the people who used the footpath and also used the widened road was Nathalia Koukou. She was born in 1921 and she grew up in Kom. Her husband, Peter Nkwain, fought in the Second World War and after demobilization he was employed in Bamenda as a gardener in the D.O.’s residence. Koukou visited him two years after the war, that is in 1948, passing by the normal footpaths mentioned above. In 1955 she testified that while in a vehicle she need only look across to see the footpaths of Twang Kwabeilla and Ngwin Mbzingou. Writing in 1949, the Resident of the Cameroon Province indicated that some parts of that road had been deviated.

Thanks to the vehicle, people who migrated to distant places were able to return home much faster. According to Cosmas, ‘I was able to visit Bamenda twice a month but before the vehicle I could do so only once in three months’; an indication of just how much distance had effectively been compressed with the introduction of the vehicle. Formally, it took Kom people at least two to three days to reach Bamenda depending from which part of Kom the person was coming. If the person was coming from Njinikom, he or she would spend the first night at Kedjom Keku, and the second

<table>
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<th>Carrier rate/loaded</th>
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<td>Nkambe</td>
<td>1/9d</td>
<td>2/-d</td>
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17 Interview with Ngontum Janarius, Sho, 76 years, Kom, 13 April 2008.
18 Interview with Nathalia Koukou, Njinikom, 87 years, 7 August 2008.
19 File Cg 219/29 Native Administrative roads, Bamenda Province (NAB).
20 Interview with Pa Nchouji Cosmas, Njinikom, 4 July 2007, He was one of the passengers that constantly entered the vehicle.
night at Bambui. If the person was coming from Fundong area, he or she would spend the first night at Mbzigou, the second night at Kedjom Keku, and then the third at Bambui. With the introduction of the vehicle in their midst it took only a single day to reach Bamenda. Discussions on new ICTs and globalisation suggest that time and distance have been compressed. From the discussion with our informants, their new experiences with the ‘new’ ICT of vehicle and road in the 1950s showed that time and distance had also been compressed.

That compression of time and distance characterised the delivery of mails too. In 1955 the Postal Agency, was opened in Njinikom, and Benard Komtangi became its first postal clerk. He was born in 1932 at Njinikom. He went to St. Anthony’s School, Njinikom, in 1942, and completed in 1948, obtaining his Standard Six Certificate. He then went to Bamenda where he tried his hand in photography but was not successful. He then went to Wum where he met his elder brother, Damian Komtangi. He claims that with motor vehicle transport, mail was delivered faster and the vehicle went to Bamenda twice a week in the dry season and once a week in the rainy season. He estimated that a total of more than 300 letters were handled in the Njinikom Postal Agency per month but that mail runners lost their jobs. That meant that the vehicle also transported letters from Kom to Bamenda and vice versa.

Motor vehicles and social status

The coming of the motor vehicle also led to the rise of new class of people in Kom that included drivers, motor boys, charterers and mechanics. These new ‘professionals’ each mastered this new technology and new form of geographical mobility. The first driver, Ishola, drove the vehicle for one year and after that the owner decided to give out the vehicle on hire to a driver, Yerimma, who drove it for one year after which Nsah employed the first Kom driver, Marx Nkwain, a prince.

The driver performed the most important function with the vehicle and was greatly admired. He did not talk while driving and when he spoke people listened carefully. Most of the time, he made jokes to help passengers laugh and relax. Wrigley (1986: 77-129), writing about West African drivers, noted that ‘The internal combustion engine initiated many people into modern technology, and the lorry driver became the new type of African hero, the adventurer who, like the traders and porters of earlier times travelled dangerously beyond the tribal horizons and even beyond the colonial ones’. Gewald (2002) was even more specific and noted amongst the Hereros that drivers were considered to be higher in status than other people. The situation in Kom was not very different.

Drivers were also sources of information about the world beyond Kom. Specifically, the driver was the educator for passengers who were not sure of their destinations. Sometimes the driver was a messenger, bearing messages or carrying little packages from friends to friends elsewhere. This situation was not unique to Kom. Jordan (1978: 33) has described how in West Africa, lorry drivers were used to poking fun and playing the roles of messengers. All in all, the material points to the emergence of a new

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21 Interview with Bernard Komtangi Kuma, Iteiniilah, Njinikom, 26th June 2008. He died on December 26, 2008.
22 Ibid.
class of people who were given birth by the introduction of a new technology, the vehicle.

The charterer and the ‘motor boy’ were the closest assistants to the driver. The first of Nsah’s vehicle was Boniface Ngoh. After his primary school in 1952 he was jobless, when Nsah contacted his uncle, Ambrose Beng whom they had met at Kombone, in Kumba. His uncle immediately accepted that Boniface should become a Nsah’s motor boy. According to Boniface, his job was tedious but also prestigious and his friends looked up to him. As a motor boy his job was to sit on the tail board of the vehicle with a piece of wood, a wedge. When the vehicle was climbing a hill with difficulty the driver would shout ‘we-dg-e’ and then the motor boy immediately went down and put the piece of wood behind the last tyre and the vehicle continued climbing. The motor boy would follow the vehicle on foot until it finished climbing the hill and he could re-enter the vehicle with his wedge. As a motor boy it was also his duty to sleep inside the vehicle at night.

Then there was the charterer. He was the person who collected the money from the passengers and kept an account of each trip. If they were to spend a night outside Kom as they did most of the time, the charterer paid the driver and motor boy their feeding and accommodation allowances. One of the charterers was Raphael Njouchie. He was born in Njinikom in 1932, and attended St. Anthony’s School, Njinikom from 1940 to 1946. Upon completion he was employed as a part time teacher with the Catholic School Mbaw, Kom. He fell out with Catholic authorities because he was dissatisfied with his salary. He left for Kumba in 1950 and James met him in 1953. He used to keep accounts of James’s produce. Naturally, when James bought the vehicle in 1955 he became the charterer. Raphael testified that he was a very proud of that job which gave him power over the other two people who operated the vehicle. He had an exercise book which he kept all accounts including fares and charges on luggage and feeding allowances of the motor boy and the driver and himself. He also kept accounts of the cost of vehicle repairs. He worked in this vehicle for one year after obtaining his standard six certificate and after that he was called up by the mission and sent to the Teacher’s Training College, Kake, Kumba.

The constant servicing of the vehicle was carried out by ‘Cammanda’ Ngong Tim, who himself had never been to school in the western sense, and more strange, had very little experience with vehicles. Nevertheless he had always wanted to be a mechanic and the opportunity came when his father’s friend bought a vehicle. The first time the vehicle abruptly stalled he knew that there was something wrong but did not know exactly what the problem was. Using very crude tools he hit a few knobs. The driver kick-started the vehicle again. When the vehicle owner heard the story he was so happy with him that he bought him two spanners. The driver kick-started the vehicle again. When the vehicle owner heard the story he was so happy with him that he bought him two spanners. He was frequently invited to the owner’s compound to help with some menial jobs. The relationship between the vehicle owner and him gradually became a father-son relationship. He started a roadside mechanic shop and was always ready to help when there was a problem.

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23 Interview with Boniface Ngoh, Njinikom 27 June 2008.
24 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
The fact that he had not formally been to school makes his experience quite interesting. It demonstrates how technology is not always mastered by people who are educated in the western sense. Often it requires creativity and the sense to ‘domesticate’ and adapt it for their needs. Cammanda followed his talent until he became one of the best Mercedes Benz mechanics in Bamenda.27

Roadside mechanics became prominent in the early 1950s as a result of the introduction of the first motor vehicles. Writing about this phenomenon, McLaughlin (1979) and Ikporukpo (2002), described how mechanics carved out an important niche for themselves in both Ghana and West Africa in general. The point is made more forcefully by Verrips & Meyer (2001: 153-184), in their research in Ghana. Using the example of Kwaku’s car they show how Ghanaians understood and dealt with imported cars by restructuring them to suit Ghanaian needs.

The case of the mechanic, the motor boy, and driver also illustrates the implications of kinship for geographical mobility and new technologies. Geographical mobility and the ownership of certain technological objects, for example, could modify and create new forms of kinships and create ‘regimes’ that had not existed before. Those people who worked closely with the lorry and those who only went to the farms to work for the vehicle owner in a sense became his ‘brothers and sisters’ not in the conventional sense of consanguinity as it has been used, but in a biblical idiomatic way of ‘who is more your sister or brother’? Of this type of relation, Carsten (2001: 1) says:

The authors describe what being related does for particular people living in specific localities in Africa, Europe, America, India, China, Madagascar and Alaska. Rather than taking the content of kinship for granted, they build from first principles a photo of the implications and lived experience of relatedness in local contexts. It is a truism that people are always conscious of connections to other people. It is equally a truism that some of these connections carry particular weight socially, materially, affectively. And often, but not always, these connections can be described in genealogical terms, but they can be described in other ways too.

In other words, Carsten argued that the relations of people to the vehicle show that relations could also be invented through other means and for new needs. They are not limited to blood ties but are focused on common interests like the vehicle.

James Nsah, the vehicle owner, became an ‘icon’ on whom people depended for several things. James had acquired a large parcel of farmland from the Fon of Kom and needed labour to farm it. On days when the vehicle did not travel to Bamenda or Mamfe, it transported labour to his farm. The people worked cheerfully and at the end of each day he rewarded them with salt and palm oil. These were basic commodities which were scarce at the time. Those who had no money to pay their fare to Bamenda or Mamfe and who had worked on his farms asked for and were given lifts.28 Evidently, owning a vehicle brought prestige and power as well as other social obligations.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the coming of motor vehicle into Kom in 1955 and the impact of this transport technology on society. It was observed that the person who bought the vehicle had farms in which he cultivated major cash crops like coffee and cocoa. He also employed a number of people who worked for him. Finally, he had to

27 Interview with Cammanda Tim, Old Town, Bamenda, 19 August 2008.
28 Interview with Boniface Ngoh, Njinikom, 29 June 2008.
sell off the farms and his farm house in order to get money which he used to buy the vehicle. In buying the vehicle he depended on Kom people who were living in Lagos at the time. The vehicle came with many consequences into Kom. It affected mobility, it led to dependency and it also showed how technology could be accommodated in a creative way by the society. In perspective the motor vehicle opened Kom to different spaces. The history of transport and communication in Kom must also be seen in the wider context of Cameroon and African history. The increase and accelerating rates of change in transport, especially of the vehicle, geographical mobility and communication that are generally called globalisation began to affect Kom very early, and materialised through the interlocking of a multitude of more or less local hierarchies.

As it has been stated elsewhere, 'For all its symbolic values, the fact remains that the vehicle was able to transport people from one place to another faster and with more endurance than any horse or bicycles could ever hope to muster' (Gewald, 2002). It is obvious but still important to say that the motor vehicle amongst Kom reversed the way people came to see distance, and physical landscape and how they related to each other. Within it, spatial mobility might have increased exponentially and *ipso facto*, proximity among people. Yet at the same time it led to the loss of contact among places and people and vice versa because the new wider road deviated from old nodal points. The vehicle enabled Kom people to reach distant areas much more quickly. By that same token Kom was increasingly becoming a transnational community. The bridging of space and the increase in mobility came about because of the wider road and motor vehicle. The man who bought the vehicle represented another social class than Benedicta, who belonged to a class that was literate and mobile because of schooling. James had no schooling. He was mobile because he had money and became influential in Kom because he bought a vehicle. So the Kom’s global encounter led to the coming of *afuem a kfaang* in Kom. As a form of technology the vehicle brought with it a ‘regime’ in which people could quickly identify themselves as belonging to the lineage of the vehicle owner.

The chapter has also argued that the vehicle created a social structure around it, and concludes finally that Kom expressed their ‘Komness’ by baptising foreign objects with Kom names which they could understand. The next chapter turns its attention to the church which was not a practical technology like the motor vehicle but which affected Kom geographical and social mobility and identity as well, in several ways.