

Article

Azai Dosi Kfaang (Modern or Families of Newness): Kom Families from Village to Coast and Further Diasporic Spaces

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Abstract: This paper focuses on “families of newness”, which amongst the Kom of Northwest Cameroon are known as azai dosi kfaang. It argues that because of geographical and social mobility experiences, families have not remained static, and consequently, the further they go from the village the more modernized they become. In recent times, African societies as well as family histories have been concerned with connecting with those who have been left behind. As a result, the blueprint that marks out the African family today is found in its mobility both within and out of the continent. At the same time, what glues the family together is the newer forms of technologies encapsulated in Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), which include amongst many others the cell phone, internet, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Letters pre-dated these new technologies and were significantly used by migrant families to stay “in touch”. Families began in the village, and as newer technologies were introduced—motor cars, a postal service and motorable roads—they moved or thought about places further away. With later technological developments, such as air travel and the mobile phone, families found themselves in distant diasporic spaces. This paper therefore hopes to make a contribution that relates family history and the history of migration to technology and social change. It also has the great value of discussing an area that gets too little attention in historiography. Fundamentally, the paper attempts to compare and contrast the use of technology, the news that could be shared (welfare, births, or obituaries), the length between contacts, the ability to make visits in person, the tensions that cropped up between family members abroad and those back at home in two periods, the 1930s–1940s and the 1990s to the present. What did these periods have in common? What was different and why? For the purpose of clarity, I will start the paper with a short introduction about the area, the issues of family formation, and *kfaang*. The second part of the paper will focus on the discussion of the “newness” of those who migrated to more modern places and the role of technology. The third part compares/contrasts the connections of families in the two periods (1930s–1940s and 1990s–present) in order to flesh out the argument.



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1. Introduction: Stating the Study Area, Issues of Family Formation and Kfaang (Newness)

The Kom is a Fondom which is located in the Bamenda Grassfields in the present-day northwest region of Cameroon. Fondoms are socio-political units which grew out of the politics of aggressiveness and attacking and subduing weaker neighbors. They are ruled by Fons, who are imbued with quasi-religious functions and are therefore considered to be sacred. They are custodians of tradition and culture, and chief priests of their societies (Nkwi 2020; Chilver 1963, 1967, 1981; Chilver and Kaberry 1967). Geographically, the Kom is estimated to be 280 square miles (Chilver and Kaberry 1967) and perched on a mountainous range of 5000ft. The Kom Fondom was probably founded around the mid-eighteenth century (Nkwi 1976). It includes sub-chiefdoms which were incorporated into the Kom as vassal states by Fon Yuh (c.1865–1912), the seventh ruler of the Kom. The tributary or vassal chiefdoms illustrate the politics of state building in Africa long before colonialism. Bafut is on the western border, while to the north, Bum and Mmen can be

found. The Kom is a subset of the Bamenda Grassfields. It lies between West and Central Africa and is a very key region for understanding and appreciating the sixteenth century African continent. Many scholars have bookmarked this region as the datum point of the Bantu languages and migration, as well as Central Africa's primary source of ancient sedentary cultures (Bastin et al. 1983).

The family is a subject of all societies, developed and underdeveloped, rich or poor, African or Asian, and is the oldest institution of the human world. Derived from the Latin word (*familia*), scholars have arguably defined it as a group of people who are related to one another either by consanguinity (by recognized birth) or affinity (by marriage or other relationships). The history of the family in Africa attracted the attention of anthropologists in the 1950s (Murdock 1959; Mair 1953), and since then most of the families have become geographically mobile (Robert 1986). However, it took close to three decades before any significant research on African family history took place. For instance, in 1981, a galaxy of Africanist historians and scholars presented papers in a conference which grew out of early seminars on the African family in London. The outcome of the conference was a special issue of the *Journal of African History* edited by Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (Marks and Rathbone 1983). This issue provoked and stimulated research and study into family history in Africa. This was against the backdrop of the fact that family history had already been entrenched in Western Europe and America since the 1960s and, unfortunately, was almost totally neglected in Africa. The 1981 conference was one of the beginning moments of African family history.

Families are either monogamous or polygamous and, in some societies, especially the conceptual West, consist of the father, mother and children. Families are an offshoot of marriages, which are either Western or traditional/indigenous. Amongst the Kom, cohabitation as a form of marriage was a taboo and could not be practiced in any form; just like in nineteenth-century England, cohabitation was "living in sin" (Frost 2008; Demos 1970). A family in the Kom fondom is known in anthropological jargon as a "clan", and in Kom language, *itangikom* or *isando*, which literally means the buttock of the house. Therefore, *azaindo*, the plural of buttocks, means many families. In sociological and anthropological terms, a family is neither exogamous nor endogamous, and usually has a common ancestor (Goode 1963). Its members putatively trace descent to a common ancestress. It is neither a residential unit nor does it exhibit an actual social integration.

The family's extensive nature and depth leads people to identify themselves conceptually with the unit whose solidarity is manifested in its name and a common legendary ancestress (Forster and Orest 1976). Like in other societies, families in the Kom fondom have been subjected to social change due to factors that were introduced into their societies and which triggered geographical mobility and thus they become modern (Shorter 1976). These dynamics included colonial technologies such as schools, motorable roads and the motor car (Nkwi 2011, 2015). The opening of the post office facilitated the postage of letters, and this helped to connect migrant families with the kith and kin in their areas of origin. Significantly, the world of communications continues to change rapidly. The stories of the family, which this paper presents here, represent the reality of families in mobile communities in the age of communication technologies. From the period of letter writers and the motor car to the present period of mobile phones, the internet, and airplanes, people have been able to move and stay connected to each other in faster and more meaningful ways. This is portrayed in the literature as if it is quite recent, but significantly, it has a deep historical depth. This paper will trace how families moved out of their original spaces to the coastal and other more modern areas and kept connected to one another. At the dawn of the new millennium, newer technologies facilitated families to travel further into diasporic spaces and to use these new forms of communication. These type of families were known as kfaang families. In the course of gathering data for this paper, I tumbled over letters and photographs from the private archives of my informants. They have been used here to harness my argument in this paper.

This paper uses the concept of *kfaang* with the larger concept of transnationalism. *Kfaang* is a concept which, according to the Kom people, connotes newness. It also means innovation and novelty in thinking and doing, and the material indicators and relationships that result from it. *Kfaang* may be internally generated, but it is almost and always invariably externally induced. In many ways, it translates but is not limited to ‘modernity’ and ‘modernization’ in the Western sense, as things and people of local origin might also be labelled *kfaang*, even when clearly not foreign or Western but when they have done things to abnormal proportions. The most important characteristic of *kfaang*, therefore, is that which is ‘new’, and this might come from within or without or be something simply internally generated that is not the characteristic way of seeing and doing. Depending upon the circumstances, *kfaang* denotes a process and a product. Both involve change mediated by mobility and by implication the dynamics which facilitate spatial and social mobility (Nkwi 2011). For the purpose of clarity, I will start the paper with a short introduction about the area, the issues of family formation, and *kfaang*. The second part of the paper will focus on the discussion of the “newness” of those who migrated to more modern places and the role of technology. The third part compares/contrasts the connections of families in the two periods (1930s–1940s and 1990s–present) in order to flesh out the argument.

Another concept used in the paper is transnational migration, which is often coined as transnationalism. The literature on transnationalism is replete. It suggests a weakening of the control a nation-state has over its borders, inhabitants, and territories. It thus denotes increased immigration to developed countries in response to global economic developments, and has resulted in multicultural societies where immigrants are more likely to maintain contact with their cultures of origin and less likely to assimilate. This paper focuses on families which have travelled out of the Kom fondom to the coastal plantations and further distant spaces. Transnationalism further indicates that loyalty to the state may seem to contest equally with commitment to a culture or religion. Castles and Miller (2003) and Vertovec (2001) maintain that, with increased global mobility and access to instantaneous worldwide communication technology, boundaries dissolve and the territorial controls imposed by the traditional nation-state become less relevant.

2. “Newness” of Those Who Migrated to More Modern Places and the Role of Technology

The migration of people from place to place as individuals or as groups is potentially limitless, and generally motivated by the desire and ambition to take advantage of new opportunities for self- or group advancement. Migration has been greatly facilitated and accelerated by ‘modern’ transportation gadgets such as roads and public transport vehicles. In the Kom fondom, those who migrated historically were usually among those whose horizons had been widened by other modern agencies of change like schools, plantations, and civil administrative structures. In addition, migrants were the first people to become familiar with the ‘singing’ and ‘talking boxes,’ namely gramophones and radios, as well as shoes, western clothes and new cosmetics. In time, they possessed such items themselves, thus further distinguishing themselves as people of new ways of life. Upon their return, these migrants were also responsible for the introduction of new houses constructed with zinc and stone, a new architectural design in their areas of origin. Through their daily encounters with the wider world, they also returned home from ‘abroad’ with their outlooks changed, forming a new social strata. Hence, they enjoyed enhanced prestige and social status. This was their reward for having travelled, lived, worked and achieved away from home. The stories of this social category of people are at the heart of this section. Back from labor, they could display their experiences through photographs, dressing, vehicles, bicycles, buildings and how they lived their lives while laboring in distant places from home. These people or families who ventured out of the Kom fondom and came back with widened mental horizons were known as *kfaang* people or people of newness or *kfaang* families. Hence, these families were known as families of newness. What is relevant here to us is the role technology played in the migration of families. Between the 1940s and 1970s,

motor cars and letters were the main technologies used. Through letters, relatives sent and received news about family members who had migrated to distant or more modern areas such as the plantations which were located in the coast.

The coast as a geographical space of modernity needs some further explanation. According to information collected from informants during field work, the usual appellation of coast in the Kom language was *itini kfaang*, meaning the modern down or idea of newness. *Kfaang* in those days was just an encounter with the white man or modern ways and the whites themselves who came through the sea. The name coast usually means a coastline where the ocean meets with the land, but at the time, it denoted places like Tiko and Victoria. However, the name coast came to be used generally to mean places like Kumba, Buea, Muyuka, Muyenge, Victoria and Mundoni. All became coasts. In general, it only meant going to somewhere more superior than the area of departure. These families went to these areas for many reasons, and the most important was to work in the plantations. Some just went for adventurous reasons because they had heard interesting stories about newer places¹.

Families which went to the coast stayed for a long time before visiting the relatives they had left behind. This was because the plantations in which most of them worked could only grant them annual leave once a year or so. Therefore, they had to develop ways of communicating with their relatives. The most obvious one was through letters. These letters usually could be posted or given to anybody who was going home on leave and who came from the same area as the person sending the letter. Conversely, those who stayed back in the Kom fondom also sent letters to relatives who were living in the coast. Below is a typical letter that was written during this period, sent from a Kom family to a family member who was working in the plantations.

Letter writing became the only medium of communication in the 1930s and late 1960s, as there were no telephones, especially between rural areas like the Kom and more modern areas like the cities. Discussions on new ICTs and globalization suggest that time and distance have been compressed. This compression of time and distance characterized the delivery of mail, too. In 1955, the Postal Agency was opened in Njinikom, a village in the Kom fondom, and Benard Komtangi became its first postal clerk. He claims that with motor vehicle transport, mail was delivered faster, and the postal vehicle went to Bamenda twice a week in the dry season and once a week in the rainy season (Nkwi 2015). He estimated that a total of more than 300 letters were handled in the Njinikom Postal Agency per month. That meant that the vehicle also transported letters from the Kom to Bamenda and vice versa.

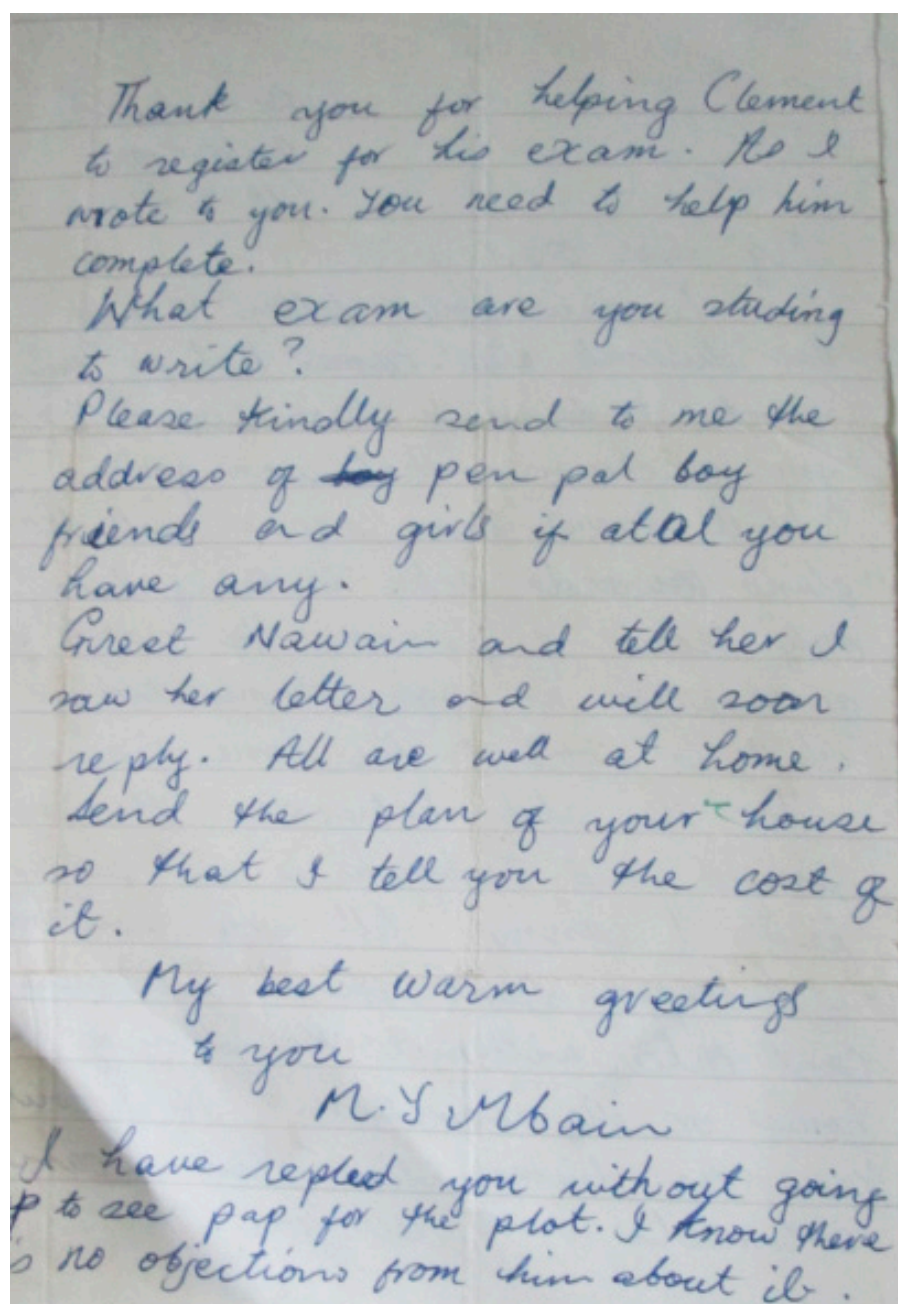
The content of letters varied according to the context in which they were written. In some letters, like the one in Figure 1, there was information about the wellbeing of relatives back at home or those in distant modern places. The news ranged from health and academic issues to common issues concerning land. However, what was relevant in the letters was also that information of common concern, such as constructing houses for those who were not around and sending greetings to wives (*nawain*) of the kith and kin. The letter below was written in 1969 by a brother to another one who was on the coast. The letter, amongst other things, is concerned with their father, who would have been in the hospital with an eye injury, but unfortunately does not have the money to pay the hospital bills. Although not explicitly, the letter insinuates that those who were on the coast or in other diasporic spaces were always loaded with the financial responsibilities of those who were left behind. Above all, some of these letters carried photos of families. These photographs were taken and sent home to areas of origin for the family members to see and admire the families of newness. The photo below is a *kfaang* family with a car. It is the family of Benedicta in Bamenda in early 1970s with their five children. Benedicta was a nurse and was married to Joseph, who was working with the Cameroon military. The car (a Renault 4) was bought from a French volunteer worker whose contract of work had finished and was going back to Europe. They decided to take a family photo and send the picture to their kith and kin in Njinikom, another village in the Kom. See Figure 2.

Children in Kom culture, just like in most societies, held a special position. They were symbols of continuity in the society and represented the wave of the future and thus those who had passed onto eternity. The children who had been mobile with their parents, in particular, were symbols of modernity at its best. Growing up in a typical African village in the 1960s or 1970s, shoes were the privilege and right of the elderly. To see children putting on shoes was amazing, and so they were suddenly known as woin kfaang (children of newness). These children could be seen wearing a short pair of well-ironed trousers and starched short sleeve shirts. Most, if not all of these kfaang children spoke some sort of creole language popularly known as pidgin English (Anderson 1983). This is a language that has spread along the West African coast. Their outfits made them a sight of admiration. If their parents were rich enough to possess a car or motor bike, they were even more admired. Diasporic Kom people posed very seriously when taking pictures of their children for their relatives, as can be seen in the picture below, which was taken in Buea in the late 1970s. Figure 3 below shows the family of Prince Mbain, who had migrated to the coast with his wife in the late 1960s. Prince, as he was popularly known, worked with the Buea National Archives from 1968 until his death in 2008. He stands in the picture with all of his children and his wife, Theresia.

C.B. m School
Belo Kom
19-2-69

My dear one,
I saw your letter through the students who came that for their sport. I heard of their wonders as you exclaim. That was good.
Well papa's eye is now well. His plans towards Acha is being delay only because of finance. He want to go there for an X-ray examination which is good to be done so.
For the plot between the compound and Tubouh is not occupied. I cannot tell you how ^{many} ~~much~~ a two foot stone round a house cant take, without the plan of the house or diamention. If I could know the diamention, then I can estimate and tell you.

Figure 1. Cont.



Thank you for helping Clement
to register for his exam. He I
wrote to you. You need to help him
complete.

What exam are you studying
to write?

Please kindly send to me the
address of ~~my~~ pen pal boy
friends and girls if at all you
have any.

Greet Nawain and tell her I
saw her letter and will soon
reply. All are well at home.

Send the plan of your house
so that I tell you the cost of
it.

My best warm greetings
to you

M. Y. Mbain

I have replied you without going
to see pap for the plot. I know there
is no objections from him about it.

Figure 1. Letter written by M. Y. Mbain.

There were also letters that showed tensions in families at home and in distant areas. The letter in Figure 4 is a typical example. Two of the fundamental causes of tension were money and mistrust. The letter below, if read very closely, shows that money was at the center of tension between Denis and his brother, who was working on the coast. Miss Theresia writes in the letter that, "... about the money that you told me to ask from your mother she told me that Denis took the money and just used up and he have (sic) only given her two thousand francs. He (sic) is asking for a thousand now and he cannot give and he is only deceiving your mother the(sic) she should come so so and so day."

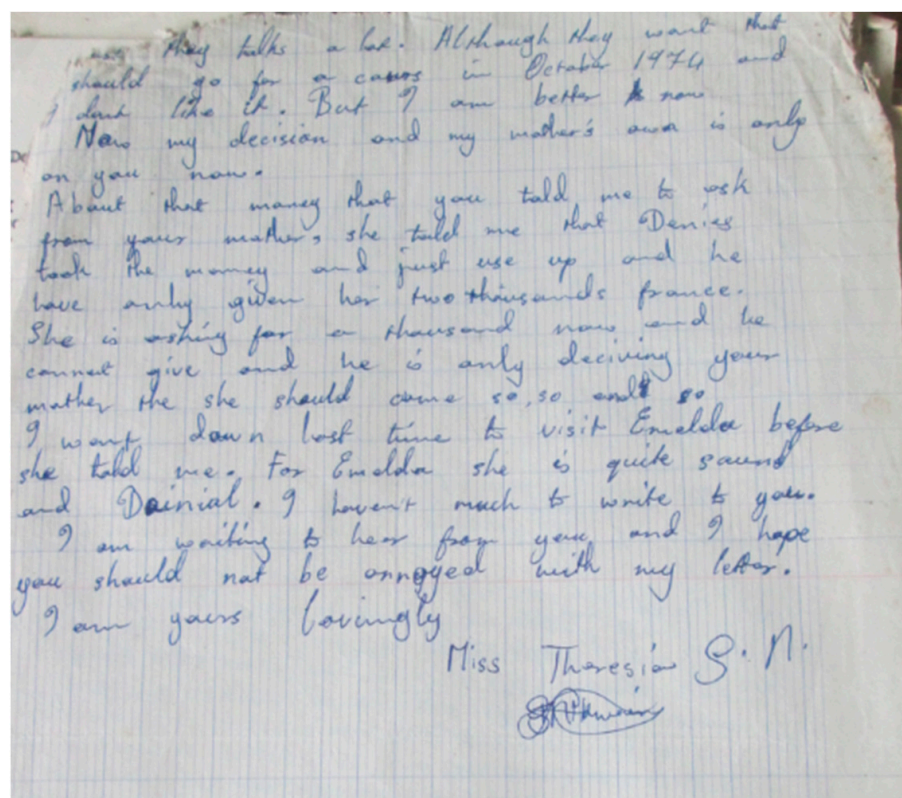


Figure 2. Benedicta and her family in Bamenda valorizing their newly acquired car.



Figure 3. Mbain and his family in Buea, with his children well-dressed and his wife wearing a beaver hat.

Families which went to work in the plantations finally came home after retirement and created or recreated social networks. The most important social network was that with the family (nuclear and extended). Interactions with spouses and children were different from those with the extended family because retirees trusted these persons more. Some extended family relationships had been strained, as was the case with one Kumbong. In a personal communication, he said he had become his brothers' enemy because he took them to court when they squandered the money he sent for them to build his retirement home.



... they talks a lot. Although they want that
should go for a casino in October 1976 and
I don't like it. But I am better to now
Now my decision and my mother's and is only
on your name.
About that money that you told me to ask
from your mother, she told me that Denies
took the money and just use up and he
have only given her two thousands francs.
She is asking for a thousand more and he
cannot give and he is only deceiving your
mother the she should come so, so could so.
I want down last time to visit Emelda before
she told me. For Emelda she is quite sound
and Dairial. I haven't much to write to you.
I am waiting to hear from you and I hope
you should not be annoyed with my letter.
I am yours lovingly
Miss Theresia S. N.
[Signature]

Figure 4. A letter showing tension because of money.

This statement of Kumbong's calls for attention. Remittances often led to tensions cropping up when senders believed the funds were misused by their kith and kin. Remittances have recently caught the attention of researchers ([Antwi-Boateng 2012](#); [Eckstein and Najam 2013](#); [Kleist and Vammen 2012](#); [Levitt and Lamba-Nieves 2011](#)). In the 1930s, 1940s and mid-1960s, the heavy years of geographical mobility, relatives sent back remittances to their kith and kin either for them to construct houses or purchase for them plots or to do other things. Some relatives were not honest enough and so they took the money and squandered it. It was no wonder that when such families came home, they were shocked to see that all the money they had been sending home was never well used. These were issues that brought a lot of tension between relatives, and the kfaang family had to struggle for survival with the children.

As already stated, family geographical mobility to the coast was facilitated by technologies of the day. The time and timing of families to return to the village was often in a space of one year or so, except if some emergency forced them to come home. Returns took place mainly in the dry season or the month of April when early rains were just beginning to fall. Homecoming was a particular occasion which went with a special touch. Compounds were swept in anticipation of the arrival of the family or family member from the more modern area. Once the family arrived, people flooded the compound of the return family of newness. Some came in anticipation of getting letters, some came only to get verbal news, and some came only to admire the family that had come from a more modern

geographic space. Some still came to enjoy the new “goodies” which the returned family had brought home.

Coming home was facilitated by the road and motor car technologies. Roads were constructed to link places, and people could only use motor cars to travel on them (Nkwi 2011). The plantations in the 1940s were the destination to which most Kom people went. Those who could travel to the plantations came home on leave with their families looking modern and sometimes talking *itangikom* with an adulterated accent. Members of these families were changed in mental outlook and dressing attire; they wore shoes, and this was something strange in the village in those days. This earned them the name *azai-dosii kfaang*. Their cuisines produced different aromas from what was known in the rural areas. The men wore coats and polished leather shoes. One of these families which exhibited *kfaangness* to abnormal proportions was the family of Barnabas. Barnabas was born in 1929, and after his elementary schooling at St Anthony’s school Njinikom, he joined the teaching profession. He travelled around the region teaching. After that, he took up the nursing profession. He then joined the plantations as a nurse and rose to the rank of hospital medical supervisor. He got married to Elizabeth in 1969 and they gave birth to seven children: two boys and five girls. While in the plantations, he kept connected to the village through letters, while always coming home on leave. His *kfaang* was demonstrated by two cars, a Volkswagen and a Peugeot 405, which he brought to the village. Further, he had two ‘German shepherd dogs’. He constructed a house of stone and corrugated zinc. When he came home on leave he won the admiration of those who had stayed back in the village. With the children ‘clacked’ in white socks and black sandals, jumping out from the car, the family had bypassed the ordinary family in the Kom village. Interestingly, Barnabas got married to a second wife who was not from the Kom fondom but from Bali, and therefore could not exhibit many attributes of *komness* like *itaghikom*. This second wife was from Bali, another Fondom in the Bamenda Grassfields. He had met her at a school she was teaching at. He married her in the plantations in the mid 1970s, and with her bore six children: two boys and four girls.

The motor car or motor cycle, like the one in Figure 5 below, symbolized modernity, along with the way the children dressed. What further intrigues us here is to what degree these modern family migrants could constitute, as agents of the modern, a sort of middle class? I draw from Weinstein and Abel Ricardo (2012), who have published some excellent essays in a volume which links the formation of the middle class to returning migrants sporting modern dress and habits. This is an important intervention, as we traditionally tend to think of the middle class as a predominantly western phenomenon (Torri 1990; Delanty 2019). Furthermore, we also tend to think of mobile capital, not mobile labor, as an agent of modernization. Contemporary debates about multinational companies and their apologists suggest or argue that MNCs are a blessing for people abroad because they finally bring modernity to their sleepy little villages (Kyove et al. 2021; Foley et al. 2021). What this article shows is that the migrant laborer family is just as much a factor in the modernization process (Eckstein and Najam 2013). More importantly, it shows that “modernity” does not simply invade a village like an unstoppable juggernaut but sneaks in slowly and in fits and bursts, carried by myriad actors Piot (1999). Historians and policymakers alike, still clinging to the last vestiges of Modernization Theory, tend to treat mobile capital as the most important agent of modernization, but in Africa, taking the Kom of Cameroon western Grassfields as a case study, the Africans themselves, more often than not, brought the trappings of modernity into their villages (Giddens 2005). In the process, these returners initiated a fundamental revolution within the hierarchical organization of their societies. Below (Figure 5) is a picture of Michael and his wife, Juliana, in Victoria in 1956. Their newly acquired wealth and the hat as well as the pipe in the mouth of Michael illustrates the family in its *kfaangness*.

If the family of Barnabas exhibited *kfaang* only by coming home on leave, with their cars, dogs, and well-dressed children, the family of Vincent, alias Freeboy, demonstrated *kfaang* through conspicuous consumption. Vincent was born c.1905. He got married to Juliana and they bore six children: three boys and three girls. In the late 1930s, he became

one of the first recruits of the German plantations, which were taken over by the British in 1946 (Konings 1998). Vincent worked in Bwenga plantations for more than ten years. Like most plantations, the new plantation initially suffered from a lack of labor. To attract labor, the management of the plantations promoted anyone who recruited labor from his village to a higher rank in the company. He was also paid according to the expenditure which he had incurred in the transportation of the recruits (Personal communication with author, 10 August 2010). Vincent returned to the Kom fondom to recruit people. Fortunately for him, his recruits were physically robust people. He was eventually promoted to the rank of a Headman. When there was need for more labor, he returned to the Kom on recruitment expeditions. He did that thrice, and after the fourth time he was promoted to an Overseer. As an Overseer, he controlled Headmen and labor. He worked with Pamol for more than twenty-five years before retiring in 1960.



Figure 5. Michael and Juliana in Victoria in 1956.

Meanwhile, as early as 1955, he was one of the first people who constructed his compound with stones, glass windows and zinc. He then decided to open a drinking parlor, called the Congo Bar, in 1959, which was the first in the Kom. It was because of the road and Mukong's geographical mobility that he was able to build an 'ultra-modern compound' following the standards of the time in the Kom fondom, when the majority of people were still constructing mud houses thatched with grass. It was also why he was able to open his bar selling bottled beer at a time when most people were still used to the traditional liquor, kang. Therefore, the kfaang family of Vincent could be perceived and viewed as better by the Kom people because Vincent not only constructed a compound with stones and zinc but he also constructed a beer parlor in which people consumed the kfaang or beer of newness.

Another category of kfaang families were the families of teachers. Teachers were the most prestigious people, and the teaching profession was the most fashionable in the 1940s and 1950s. Not only were they the literate class, but the home of a teacher exhibited all that was modern, from his children to the building itself. In their jobs, teachers were very mobile people and as they went to distant and more modern places so they too modernized their families. The picture in Figure 6 below is a typical kfaang family of a teacher in the 1970s. The wife and all his children look fanciful in their attires.

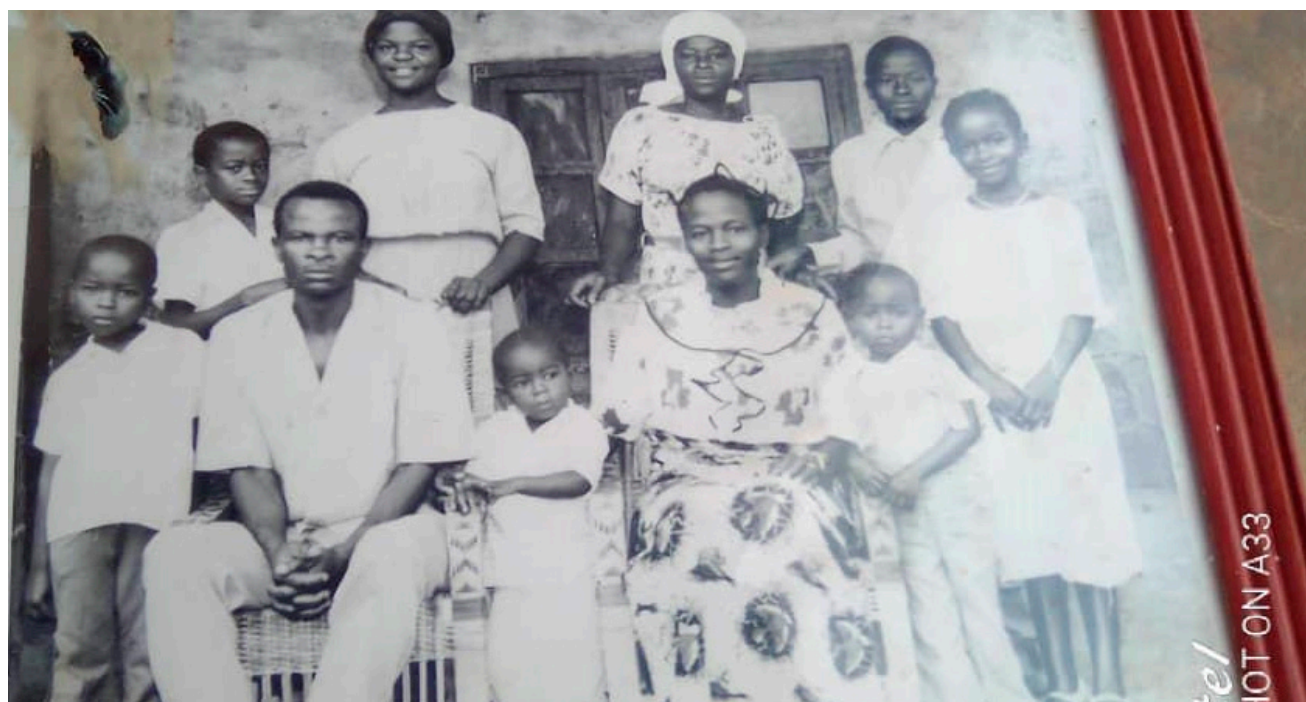


Figure 6. The family of a teacher and his family.

3. The Kfaang Family, 1990–Present

The above case studies suggest that these families migrated to plantations and elsewhere, and at the same time they were able to connect with those left behind because communication technologies in the form of letters made this possible. Secondly, roads and motor cars also facilitated their mobility. Over the past two decades, there have been tremendous changes in the way Africans have been moving out of the continent to various parts of the world, namely Europe, America and lately, Asia. The people of the Kom are not an exception. According to [De Bruijn \(2014, p. 322\)](#), “with the advance of mobile technology, socio-economic change would follow especially in some parts of Africa where this new technology has had a leapfrogging effect”.

“Modern technologies” have largely reduced distances, and so long distances have begun to diminish. According to [Vertovec \(2004\)](#), increased connectivity encapsulated in communication has become the glue of society. For us to better appreciate this, we need to position ourselves within the brackets of globalization studies, which have referred to the global village, or rather in transnational community discourses, which emphasize the social space dynamics in transnational communities ([Piot 1999](#); [Nyamnjoh 2000](#); [De Bruijn 2014](#)). The introduction of mobile phones to Africa has been one of the revolutions in communication that has occurred in Africa in general, and Cameroon in particular ([Odumosu 2017](#)). The phone has ceased to be a gadget of the common elite, and has become that of the ‘man on the streets’ or the common person ([Nkwi 2009](#)). In addition, the internet is a huge factor; social media has had a tremendous impact on Kom families in distant diasporic places, as it helps them to remain connected.

The family of Henry can illustrate this point. He was born in 1931 and got married to Beatrice in 1961. They gave birth to nine children: six boys and three girls. Unfortunately, one passed away in the Ambazonian war of independence, which has been going on in Cameroon since 2017. After this death, the family relocated to Bafoussam in francophone Cameroon. But after a short while Henry, his wife, and his grandmother went back to the village. Their second son, a university professor, moved to Holland for a research fellowship. Through the help of his elder brother, a Roman Catholic Priest living in Uganda, and their mobile phones, they talk to their parents and grandmother via WhatsApp. This

case is just a tip of an iceberg, and points to how many families have remained connected to one another while in diasporic places with the help of new technologies.

This family has been able to stay in touch because of the technological gadgets at their disposal. With the rise in connectivity, many more families have been able to stay in touch in the Kom fondom and at the same time have constructed a place known as home but out of home. Belonging becomes a very strong glue that continuously keep these families bound together. However, the further from home these families go, the more they acquire sophisticated modern habits. This, in most cases, turns kfaang into an affliction, as divorces become common in further diasporic spaces like in Europe and America. Therefore, a casual observation of such families shows that wives or husbands prefer what they call “independent” life to depending on each other. The original father or husband has ceased to become the breadwinner of the family. Some Kom families in the diaspora are constantly in courts suing for divorces, and children are most often the casualties of these unstable or broken homes.

4. Summing Up: Comparison/Contrast of the Connections of Families in the Two Periods (1930s–1970s and 1990s–Present)

This section focuses on comparing and contrasting the two periods (1940s–70s and 1990–present) with regards to the connections of families of the Kom fondom. What were the continuities and changes during these periods? In the last quarter of the 20th century and in the early 21st century, there was an ever-increasing number of Kom families who migrated to diasporic spaces. Thus, in both eras, families had to find a way to remain connected. Both periods also saw the importance of families returning ‘home’, where they were familiar and yet changed. While the coastal people were known in the late 1930s–60s as ‘coastal peoples’ or kfaang people, this new wave of migrants were known as *bushfallers* (Nyamnjoh 2001).

The *bushfallers* signalled a different type of identity, as new technologies, too, had developed. However, what made them quite distinct was their social visibility. Their social visibility showed itself in various ways. Unlike their predecessors, who could get eyeglasses, radios or talking gramophones and build stone houses, the new bushfaller families returned with porsche cars, Hummer jeeps and built very ‘intimidating’ houses. Their dress changed, too. It was quite common to see bushfaller boys and men putting on earrings, long boots, and ‘Jonnie Walker’ types of coats. Dreadlocks and Marlboro caps became common currency as new forms of dressing cultures acquired in distant lands. The way they shared information itself further enhanced their different identities. Pidgin (a creolized type of language) and/or the English language in the context of these new migrants was already giving way to the American language of ‘rapping’. This new behavior showed through the way that they acquired and appropriated different cultures that they might have regarded as superior to their own. The implications of this, if placed in perspective, suggests that migrations internally and internationally have had some differences and commonalities as well as continuities and changes.

In the 1960s, a new communication medium, the radio, spread throughout Cameroon. Through radio broadcasts, the few that could afford radios listened to news as well as announcements made through this medium. Print media, although timid, was also another medium where news was shared. In the 1990s, the changes became more profound and revolutionary. The birth of new ICTs, including the internet and social media, were a watershed for Kom family migrants. Anxious and curious to share information from home and also to send information from abroad and to stay in a space known as home although out of home, they created a Yahoo group forum which they named the *Afo-a-kom* Yahoo group forum. Just like other migrants from the global South (Kleist and Vammen 2012). More importantly, the forum was able to share various kinds of information between those at home and abroad instantly. This included *inter alia*: obituaries, achievements of Kom people at home and in diasporic spaces, news related to employment opportunities, international affairs, as well as postings of pictures of cultural significance. At the end of the mail the following words were inscribed. Visit www.komkingdom.com (accessed on

28 August 2021); *KOMKingdomMotto: WainAfoy + naNyamNgviy*. *WainAfoy + naNyamNgviy* is translated as child (sing.), children (pl.), food, and prosperity. Among the Kom people, children are as important as in most African societies. They represent the wave of the future and lineage continuity. In Kom tradition, if somebody dies childless, they have a particular burial arrangement. Those who have children never die because their children will carry their images all through their lives. Once a mother or father dies, the child is known as wain P . . . or wain T . . . , meaning the child of P or T. As far as food is concerned, the Kom do not differentiate between food and crops. However, food, like in all human societies, occupies a very central place in the Kom society. To guarantee constant food, religious cults are performed at the beginning of the planting season (Nkwi 2020). A combination of children and food equals prosperity. As a result, this makes up the motto of the Kom people.

5. Conclusions

Families, whether nuclear or extended, monogamous or polygamous, are very important for human civilization. In Africa, the concept of the family is different from the concept in the western world. In Africa, the family tree has many branches. These branches include children, nieces, cousins, uncles, and aunts. For the Kom people, this is not an exception. However, this paper has attempted not only to trace Kom family history but also focuses on how technologies have facilitated the mobility of Kom families. It has done so by choosing two periods. During the colonial period, in which plantations and more modern places were opened, motorable roads and motor cars facilitated mobility. Those who moved to plantations and coastal Cameroon were labelled kfaang families, and children from such families were known as woin-kfaang. Technologies of mobility therefore facilitated such families to venture out of the Kom fondom into the plantations and further diasporic spaces. Such families returned to Kom with their mental horizons widened, acquired new wealth, and constructed new houses of stone and zinc. For all of these, they were known within the Kom as azaiido sii kfaang. This article contends that Kom families have embraced different environments with different consequences. They have stayed connected to one another through history by using different forms of technology. They first started by using letters to communicate with their relatives. As newer forms of technology were discovered and families went further, mobile phones and the internet became widely used by Kom families in transnational spaces. On a final note, the author invites researchers and scholars to see if this paper's findings are applicable elsewhere.

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Note

- ¹ It is interesting to note that adventurers move from place to place. However, as used in this context, it did not really mean that these people had nothing to do in their areas of destination, but rather that they were not involved in the prestigious jobs of the day like working in the plantations and teaching.

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