

Salt Wata Modernity: The Port City of Victoria (Cameroon)

ca. 1920's-1980

Walter Gam Nkwi

Introduction

During the first globalization, on the eve of the imperialist expansion, the West African coastal societies experienced a significant growth supported by the development of ports and cities. These ports appeared to be central tools for the economic development in these societies. Brian Hoyle maintains that ports and cities are frequently, although not necessarily, intertwined in their location, development, functions, challenges and difficultiesⁱ. Fundamentally, a port acts as a portal and also a node within a transport network. On the other hand a city is essentially a central place within a wider socio-economic system. Furthermore, ports and cities might not be mutually compatible. However, the port, whenever and wherever it has been well developed, normally and traditionally gives rise to some degree of urban growth, so much so that port-cities' nexus have become complex and well establishedⁱⁱ.

Nevertheless, ports and cities appear not to have performed the same functions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Ports exclusively functioned as precursors of the colonization. They also joined the regional productive structures with the international marketsⁱⁱⁱ. Ports and their cities or hinterlands were the focus of the investments of the colonial administration. Cities became the cynosure of colonial administration. This was more glaring in the French colonies which included Dakar, Casablanca, Algiers and Brazzaville. These were great port cities which became the axle of the French colonial empire in Africa. These ports consequently led to regional commercial activities.^{iv}

Closely linked to African port-cities was the fact that they acted as portals of colonial modernity. The literature on modernity is replete and a closer look at it suggests that it is a problematic term. When seen through analytical "binoculars it is quite slippery, ambiguous and

vague”^v because it seems that different societies and communities have their own way of perceiving and understanding the concept which has been largely colored by being too “closely connected to western ideologies of universal development”^{vi}. In other words, modernity can best be understood if we contextualize it in different world societies because there are peculiar ways of understanding and perceiving it. What it means for one society might not necessarily mean the same for another one^{vii}. As I have argued elsewhere, modernity came to mean something different in the Cameroon hinterlands. The port of Victoria acted as a funnel through which the multiple modernities passed through to reach peoples’ homes.^{viii}

This article is about Victoria, a port city which developed in the nascent years of colonial administration. My focus will be on the origins of tropical cities as distinctive phenomena on the West African coast as gateways which emerged as a result of competitive rivalry between old and new centers and between different European powers while concentrating on Victoria port-city. The presence of European powers in West Africa had a ripple ramification on old city centers as new ones were created. Old city centers like Timbuktu and Kumbi Saleh soon dwindled and new cities cropped up along the coast.

Victoria was "new" in comparison to the port-cities of Calabar, Bimbia or Douala and other west African ports like Accra, Lagos, Abidjan and Cotonu. It had no indigenous chiefs to deal with and it was the centre of religious missions and their access to the hinterland. Alfred Saker bought it as some form of investment and the church was one of the first infrastructures. So the distinctive nature of the religious and mercantile origins of Victoria and being free from other constraints makes it unusual when compared to other coastal cities of the period. Secondly, Victoria remained for a long time in the *imaginaire* of the migrants who travelled to this port-city. This is encapsulated in their travelogues as well as the artifacts which were brought from Victoria. After the collapse of the port the stories around the port have remained on the lips of those who went to Victoria and also those who just witnessed them. Finally, more central and crucial to this article is the “modern consumption” and the emergence of a youth middle class being a result of traveling to the port city of Victoria.

The data for this article was harvested during my doctoral research between 2009 and 2011 in the Bamenda Grassfields of Northwest Cameroon, some 354 km from Victoria. I

interviewed people who travelled to Victoria in the 1930s and were back in their region of origin. These people were just a representative of the sum total of those who had actually migrated to Victoria. As a result of intensive interviews and trust bestowed on me I got some photographs of the migrants while they were in Victoria. I have produced some of the pictures here with their tacit agreements. The aim of using the photographs is to illustrate, quite clearly, the point which I am making. Additionally, I visited the Buea National Archives located in Buea, the administrative capital of the Southwest region of Cameroon.

I will start by sketching the historical roots of Victoria. I will then proceed to examine the port city and how it developed to attract migrants and also how the migrants lived and remember Victoria. The article will end by examining the dynamics which led to the demise of Victoria as a port city and what can be made out of this city at the moment.

Historical Background of Victoria

Arguably, the foundation of Victoria could be traced to the London Baptist Missionaries who were led by Alfred Saker who bought the land at the cost of £18,00 for his missionary activities. After the abolition of slave trade in the British Empire in the early 1830s some emancipated slaves from Jamaica pressed for an evangelical mission to return to the African homeland. In England the religious motive was complemented by a search for scientific and economic goals geared towards the opening up of more lands in Africa. In 1841, the Niger Expedition was launched with the primary goal of opening up modern day Nigeria to British traders, missionaries and scientists. The Committee of the London Baptist Missionary Society (LBMS) took advantage of the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the British Empire as well as the Niger Expedition and decided that an effort be made to give the light of life to the Dark continent and also to atone for the crimes that English greed had for centuries committed by proclaiming in Africa itself the glad tidings of divine liberty from on high^{ix}.

Consequently, the missionaries left England on 13 October 1840 and reached Fernando Po (Present day Equatorial Guinea) on January 1841. While in Fernando Po they were given an introductory letter by the former Governor of Fernando Po, Lt. Colonel Nicolls. In 1845, the Spanish Consul, General Don Carlos Chacon, arrived in Fernando Po with instructions to send the Baptist Missionaries away unless they agreed to stay in a private capacity only. Although

they refused they were allowed to stay unmolested until after 1856 when the Spanish Catholics in Fernando Po made things quite difficult for them. In May 1858 the Spanish Jesuits arrived on the island and proclaimed Catholicism the main religion. Thence, Alfred Saker decided to move with his followers in Fernando Po to the mainland opposite the island. This area was Bimbia but after he acquired it, he named it Victoria in honor of Queen Victoria of England.

Saker's expulsion from Fernando Po had different but contrasting motives. He was expelled because of religious and, to a lesser extent, economic motives. His decision to found Victoria was also due to religious and economic motives. Writing about this view, Saker's biographer, Edward Bean Underhill said *inter alia*:

I (Alfred Saker) need a home for our people where a trade may be created and to which commerce may be drawn. I searched for a landing only....Here if Her Majesty's Government sanction and sustained our efforts, can be put, coal stores, provision stores, building yards and every other essential for commerce. Here too a highway may be made into the interior and the native produce be shipped in smooth water for Europe. It will be essentially a religious enlightened colony....^x

If well scrutinized, it will be deduced from Saker's words that there were already ingredients of a sea port as early as 1858. Secondly, it also shows that the foundation of Victoria was due to religious as well as economic motives. No records so far have shown that there was any resistance in the founding of Victoria. Neither has there been any documented evidence that natural rulers played any significant role in the acquisition of Victoria.

The beginnings of Victoria could be traced to the 1880's when the Germans annexed Cameroon. The Germans envisaged creating a commercial economy. That ambition was well executed when volcanic soils which are often fertile for agriculture led to the opening of plantations both in Victoria and coastal Cameroon. These plantations cultivated various agricultural products such as palm oil, rubber, bananas, pepper and cocoa^{xi}. To get these things

shipped to Europe, water transport became a *sine qua non* and by extension Victoria became a seaport and city.

Although the Victoria seaport was officially opened in the 1880s it reached its ‘heyday’ only in the 1920s during the British colonial administration^{xii}. When Britain took over the portion of Cameroon in which Victoria was located it made no formal attempt to colonize either the coast or the interior. As a result it continued to police the area with its navy and returned informal control of parts of it as a result of the agreements reached with coastal authorities for the suppression of slave trade. *Ipsa facto* the British consular officials kept a watchful eye on developments at the coast (port) with a view to seeing that British commercial and humanitarian aims were not undermined.^{xiii}

The Victoria Port City

Victoria within the context of British colonial administration was the capital of Victoria Division and one of the four administrative Divisions of the British Southern Cameroons. It had a land surface of 1,166 sq. miles^{xiv}. Victoria became the economic nerve center and hub of many commercial activities. It all began with the opening of commercial firms as well as trading companies. Table 1 show the number of companies and their nationalities as well as some businesses that were found in Victoria.

Table I: Trading Companies and Merchants in Victoria

Name of Company	Nationality	Nature of Business	Remarks
Woodin and Co. Limited	British	Export and Import	1916 operating a branch in Victoria
John Holt and Co.	British	Export, Import and Retail	Established in Victoria in 1933
Compagnie Forestiere Sangha Oubangui	French	Forestry	Established in 1947
Jacob Adebona	Nigerian	Petty Trader	Had factories in Victoria as early as

			1916
J. Lawani Marsha	Nigerian	Retail Petty trader	Established in 1924
Z.P. Thorpe	Sierra Leonean	Retail Petty trader	Established 1924
A.G. Thompson	Togolese	Retail	Established 1923
Body Lawson	Togolese	Trader-Import Export	Established 1923
S.D. Johnson	Togolese	Importer/Exporter	Established 1922
Sillas Attipo	Liberian	Trader	Established 1923
S. Hays	Sierra-Leonean	Trader	Established 1922
Charles Abbey	Monrovia	Trader	Established 1922
Mpondo Elame alias Freeborn	Douala-Import and Export	Wholesale trader	Established 1922
Grenoulleau	French	Retail	1919
De Bandera	Greek	Retail	1921
Hausa Co.	British	Dealer of goods of German origin	1923

SOURCE: Simon Joseph Epale, *Plantations and Development in Western Cameroon, 1885-1975: A study in Agrarian Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Ventage Press, 1985)

From the table above, the interconnectedness of Victoria cannot be left in doubt. Victoria was becoming a veritable hub where much commercial activities were taking place. Traders came from the West African coast, Greece and France. Most of the companies were British. A closer look at the table also reminds us of Victoria as a portal of globalization and colonial modernity. This suggests that there is always a higher concentration of global interconnectedness existing at a given time and period. Mathias Middell and Katia Naumann have observed that such windows through which globalization is understood could be those places which have acted

as centers of world trade or global communication, and have served as entering points for cultural transfer and where institutions and practices for dealing with global connectedness have been developed^{xv}. The strength of the above scholars suggests that trade was at the center of globalization and by extension modernity. In other words it could be claimed that globalization transferred modernity. Apart from what is obtained in the table, in 1909 Victoria alone had 18 firms in active operation with 99 European employees and 4, 184 Cameroonian employees.^{xvi}

From Victoria some of the business firms radiated their *modus operandi* to the hinterlands such as John Holt and United African Company. John Holt was the earliest company to be established in Victoria. This company specialized in buying palm products like kernels and palm oil. These products were very essential for the survival of factories back in Europe. With some of these products margarine was produced. In the 1930s, John Holt already had branches in Kumba and Bamenda all located in the hinterlands. The United Africa Company (UAC) was a British company which principally traded in West Africa during the 20th century.^{xvii}. Both companies specialized in the exploitation and trading of palm kernels and palm oil which were exported. Although by 1928 there was keen competition between these companies. In the 1930s UAC established the oil extracting and kernel cracking machine around Mamfe. The entire palm products passed through Victoria port to Europe^{xviii}.

All Roads lead to Victoria: Migrants and the allure of Modernity

It will be misleading to see the port city of Victoria only in economic terms or in terms of exports and imports. Migrants travelled to the port city in search of jobs and others only to admire the fascination of modernity. Migrants came in from the hinterlands, especially the Bamenda grassfields which included Meta, Bali, Bafut, Wum, Kom, Nso as well as foreigners like Togolese, Creole fishermen, especially the Ejaw of Nigeria and Sierra Leoneans.^{xix}

The colonial administration saw the need to construct roads which were to facilitate the migration of these people to Victoria. The importance of roads was never in doubt at the beginning of the colonial venture. Speaking of German rule, Rudin makes the point unequivocally. "Roads were an administrative, commercial, and military necessity from the beginning of the occupation of the colonial territory^{xx}." The interest of British colonial authorities in widening the roads was to overcome the disadvantages of the carrier or portage

system and reduce the cost of running the colony to its barest minimum, with the colony bearing the cost.^{xxi}

British colonial administrators in Cameroon spent enormous efforts justifying not only the inevitability but the desirability of ‘good’ roads, first, in the Cameroon Province and then in the Bamenda Province which was to link Victoria. From the perspective of the Cameroon Province, writing about the main trunk road linking Bamenda and Victoria port, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lennox-Boyd, stated:

I have the honor to inform you that my council of Ministers has recently had under review the adequacy of present plans for the improvement of the Federal Trunk Road A4 which runs from Victoria to Bamenda. This road which is the spinal cord of all land communications in the Southern part of the Cameroons Trust Territory must be given priority ... the opening of a all-season artery from Bamenda to the Eastern Region boundary and to the coastal ports of Victoria is undoubtedly the prime necessity among all others at the present time ...^{xxii}

In other words, Lennox-Boyd was justifying road construction on economic grounds: roads were needed to evacuate raw materials from the hinterland to the coastal port and also to allow the movement of people. Every commentator in the territory stressed the importance of roads as the key to the future.^{xxiii}

The Bamenda Province had a population of about 400,000 people and most of those people were mobile despite the obstacles in their way such as wild forest and fast flowing rivers. If the area was linked by a wider road, it was an opportunity for those strong people to increase in numbers and go down to work in coastal plantations. With that agenda, the British colonial administration saw the connection of the Bamenda area to the littoral corridor, especially Victoria, as absolutely important.

The Voices of the Victorian returned migrants

Victoria as a port city had the trappings of modernity and thus attracted many people for various reasons. Between 1924 and 1953 Victoria population had more than quadrupled from 1,577 inhabitants to 7,000. George Courade estimates that the number of Europeans in Victoria

jumped from about 100 in the 1950s to 250 at independence in 1961. Many of them ran department stores and shopping centers like John Holt, R&W King, CCC, ICC and Pritania while the Lebanese tycoon, “Potokri” ran the monopoly in the film industry with two cinema theaters, “Rio” in New Town and “Rivoli” in Gardens^{xxiv}. Colonial records found in the Buea archives maintain that the immigrant population from the hinterlands number between 65 in 1925 to well over 200 in 1958^{xxv}.

Besides, many people from the hinterlands migrated to Victoria for several reasons. Some came for just simple adventures to see and feel modernity. Some came as laborers in the plantations and ship yards while others were on transit to other parts of West Africa. These migrants stayed in Victoria and worked and returned to their areas of origins. While in their areas of origins they narrated travelogues about Victoria even when the city had gradually petered out. Thus one of the returned migrants, Peter Abahla, captured his first experience in Victoria port-city in the following words:

I left Kom with my friends, Ndifoyin Awoh and Ngang Chea. Malawa Fuka, Megne, Milibia, Yola Ntu and many others. It took us two days to reach Kubou’s compound in Old Town, Bamenda. From Bamenda it took fifteen days to reach Bitoria (sic). We slept at Woyang in Bali; at Bamakwa Sabi and crossed Tang Sabi and spent the night at Fontem junction. From there we stayed at Nguti; Konye. and Kumba. From Kumba we stayed at Mbanga Bakundu; Muyuka; Ekona Benge. From Ekona Benge we passed through Molyko and stayed at Bolifamba. Very early we took off from Bolifamba to Bitoria (Victoria) where I saw the steamer carrying bananas and a plain of water. Bitoria (Victoria) was the place which I saw wonders. The steamer was having constant smoke coming out from its head and only steaming. The day it was to go, it made a very large sound which you could hear very far from where it was. The whole sky was dark with smoke. From below the sound was different *ahaang ahaang ahaang*. This meant that its roots that were deep down were already coming up ready to move. When it was to take off finally, I heard a bass sound *huuuuuuuuuuuug; huuuuuuuuuuuuumg; huuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuung*. At that

moment the smoke became thicker and the sky darker while the sea was divided into two parts. It now took off for another world. In fact I wonder aloud and asked myself who on earth could have made such a big thing which could carry all the people from Kom. It was a big surprise to me and looked too big for me. Then I went nearer the sea and tasted the water. It was salty and my friends told me that it was called *salt wata*^{xxvi}.

Our informant provides us with a clue as to how many people actually left Kom, one of the largest indigenous polities of Northwest Cameroon, at any one time for Victoria. From his story as many as 35 people at a time travelled down to the Coast with divergent ambitions. Some were traders while some were job seekers. Indeed, *salt wata* stories become more revealing metaphors. The stories as we have gathered from Peter bring to light the sensations and fascinations of an encounter. Moving salt water brought not only fish but very big sea water vessels with new cargo which workers spent most of the day unloading. Most of those who did the work were from the Bamenda Grasslands where no sea was to be seen. The waves showed that sea water also journeyed. In the morning the waves were usually low and in the evenings during high tides the waves came back depositing fish. The fish represent a metaphor -- just as the people had migrated to the Coast and would take home *kfaang* which represents the 'fish'.

After working for months and years the people came home with changed habits. Changed in outlook, the mentalities of these returned migrants also changed. Language was one of the changes which was readily noticed in the returned migrants. Our informant, Peter Abahla could not pronounce Victoria. Through his speech he substituted "V" with "B", thus Victoria became Bitoria. Some pretended to talk more English grammar than they had ever mastered for all their time which they had spent in Victoria. According to Jerome Ngeh, who witnessed those who went to Victoria in the mid 1950s, the returned migrants intimidated those who were not opportune to move out with their pretence of speaking good English language. Jerome could quickly spot the errors because he was in Standard Five at the time and some of these returned migrants had never ventured to school. For example, it was commonplace to hear a Victoria returned migrant saying "I is at his place yesterday" and he actually meant simply to say that "I was at his place yesterday"^{xxvii}

The language, dress and mode of speaking of the returned migrants suggest modernity. And modernity amongst the societies of the hinterland meant *kfaang, kwang, bara*. As I argued elsewhere, these terminologies amongst the societies of Bamenda Grassfields connotes newness-innovation and novelty in thinking and doing and the material indicators and relationships that result from it. They are almost invariably externally induced and in many ways, it translates but is not limited to modernity in the western sense. The most important characteristics of these terminologies is that which is new and this might simply be a way of doing something which is not the conventional way of doing it^{xxviii}. A striking parallel of such migrants today are the many Bamenda Grassfielders who had been to the United States, Europe, Japan and China as migrants. Once they are back at home, some of them pretend to talk like European and Asian people. They wear long leather boots and cowboy hats, earrings and even talk to their parents through interpreters; showing off that they have reached the depths of newness. They also come home with stories about the fascinations and sensations of Europe, America and Asia. These stories include obtaining money from machines and slotting in coins for coffee or food, and many fanciful things like luxurious Porsche cars that are available and cheaper to buy there. Both the people who had been to the Coast and to Europe and beyond constitute hierarchies in that they



are more 'endowed with modern opportunities and opportunism than the others'^{xxix}

Of particular attention was the new attire of the returned migrants. They had acquired newer ways of dressing. They put on ties and put on shirts which were popularly known at the time as "Manchester shirts". These were shirts which were claimed to have come from England to Victoria and were usually put on by people who were richer than their counterparts. The picture on the left shows young grassfielders who migrated to Victoria in the late 1940s in search of "greener pastures" to improve their well-being.

All of them worked with RW & Kings, a supermarket that dealt with all types of provisions.

Here they worked as waiters, ready to help any customer. According to one of them (name withheld), they had to save money for three years to purchase the shirts and ties because they



were more expensive than their remuneration could afford. However, the point I am making here is that such dress went with the trappings of modernity

Some of the returned migrants from Victoria remembered thus in the artifacts they acquired, especially radios, shoes and eye glasses. The radio had a special

attraction back in the rural areas. Onlookers could not imagine that people were talking in a small box. Those who possessed radios were viewed as epitomes of modernity by their peers who had not ventured out of the rural settings. The eyeglasses received less importance but were widely believed that they were “eyes” which could see and perceive. All these pointed to the fascination of new gadgets which people could not easily comprehend how these things work. The picture above shows some Victoria returnees displaying their modern attributes. Putting on new shoes, clad in new pair of trousers and holding a “talking gramophone” these gentlemen had reached “the ends of modernity”

Francis is holding a radio, probably a two band transistor. He worked with the Woodin company and the other friends with John Holt in Victoria. Francis was born in 1932 at Bali in the Northwest region of Cameroon. He obtained his standard six certificate in 1955 and gained employment with Woodin and Co, a British company which specialised in the imports of finished provision goods and exports of raw materials. He worked there as an assistant store keeper from 1956 to 1961. It was in that super market that he bought the radio which he is carrying. In a world where television sets never existed, to possess a radio (a status symbol) made one a king in the eyes of the onlookers. Homes that had radios were centers of attraction for neighbors who came to listen (to the radio) although without understanding, but for a few who had been to school. Their styles of dress, traditional regalia mixed with ties, eyeglasses and



Source: Anonymous informant with his radio which he bought in AUC shop Victoria

well-ironed trousers symbolised a bricolage of a conventional binary-“tradition and “modernity”. The way they crossed their legs shows how they found enduring modernity to embrace such ‘modern’ ways of sitting.³⁴

In the photo at left is an anonymous informant who literally adored a radio and told me that in those days it was a pearl. He had saved money for five years to enable him to purchase the

radio at UAC Victoria. Evidently its importance is depicted by the fact that the radio had its own pillow, a status symbol and a sign that he was obsessed with modernity.



Source: Courtesy of Josephine’s album.

The gender dimension of returned migrants was striking. It has been argued in most literature that African women were not independent migrants. In other words, women followed their husbands to distant places. The case of some of the women who migrated to Victoria shows the contrary. One of the women who migrated to Victoria was Josephine Titti. Born in the mid 1930s in Nso, one of the largest ethnic polities of the Bamenda Grassfields, she dropped out from the elementary school because of financial frugality. As a result she had come to know about Victoria from those who narrated stories about the port-cities. She then decided to go to Victoria in the late 1950s in search for a job. While there she was

casually employed in the European plantations. She worked there for three years and then became a housemaid to a Lebanese trader for four years. The last picture shows Josephine in her “Victorian attire.” Putting on a face cap, eye glasses, a wrist watch, trousers and leather slippers—all modernistic trappings - makes Josephine appear transformed. She had come from a background in which traditional thought and mindset still strongly believed that women were not supposed to put on trousers and other such trappings. Such changes were viewed in traditional settings found in the hinterlands as obnoxious. But those who had put it on felt modern as well as civilized. Individually or collectively, these returned people from Limbe constituted modern men and modern women.

What is further intriguing in these returned migrants is the degree to which they constitute, agents of the modernity, a sort of middle class. They were gradually changing into a new class of people different from their peers who had not gotten the opportunity to venture out of their origin to Victoria. This was exhibited in new habitual trappings which they acquired either in terms of mental change or conspicuous consumption displayed in clothes or radios or bicycles. Barbara Weinstein and Abel Ricardo have recently published some excellent essays in a volume which links the formation of the Middle Class to returning migrants sporting modern dress and habits in Mexico.^{xxx} This is an important intervention, as we traditionally tend to think of the middle class as a predominantly very western phenomenon. Furthermore we also tend to regard mobile capital, not mobile labor, as an agent of modernization, Contemporary debates about the Multinational Companies (MNC) and their apologists suggests or argue that the MNC is a blessing for people abroad because it finally brings modernity into their sleepy little villages. What this article shows is that migrant labor to Victoria port city is just as much a factor in the modernization process. More importantly, it shows that “modernity” does not simply invade a village like an unstoppable juggernaut but sneaks in slowly in fits and bursts, carried by myriad actors. Historians and policymakers alike, who are still clinging to the last vestiges of the Modernization Theory, tend to treat mobile capital as the most important agent of modernization, but in Africa, taking the above returned migrants from the Cameroon hinterlands as a case study, it was the Africans themselves, more often than not, who brought the trappings of modernity into their villages. In the process, these returnees initiated a fundamental revolution within the hierarchical organizations of their societies. The way returned migrants held the objects which

they bought in Victoria close to their “chests” or revered them could as well make one conclude that these were new forms of fetishes.

The Decline and Fall of Victoria Port City

The decline and fall of Victoria as a port city can hardly be extrapolated from the political context of Cameroon historical transformation. Thus the Reunification and Independence of the Southern Cameroons in 1961 with the Republic of Cameroon ushered in a period of general decline in the economic, social and even the political fortunes of most towns in Southern Cameroons. The reasons could hardly have been more farfetched.^{xxxii} The first thing that was done in the union was the abandonment of the Southern Cameroons Five Year Development Plan at reunification. Then the British Government, who had governed this part of the world since 1916, withdrew Commonwealth preference for Southern Cameroons bananas, a major sector of Southern Cameroons economy. Also, there was the change of currency from the pound sterling to the franc *Communaute Financiere Africaine* (CFA) in 1962. Victoria being the economic nerve center of Anglophone Cameroon was one of the first cities to be hit by these changes^{xxxii}.

One of the sectors which was hard hit by the effects of reunification was the port. By 1967 there was already a considerable decline of the activities in the Victoria port. According to Ngomba between 1969 and 1973, not only did the level of imports and exports at the Victoria port drop considerably, but during the same period the level of imports and exports actually increased at the Douala port^{xxxiii}. One reason which accounted for such a decline was the construction of a macadam road linking Victoria port and Douala Port, often known as the reunification road. This accelerated the use of motorized vehicles on the road rather than use of the sea. Combined with the introduction and use of containers for lifting produce from Victoria to Douala further lowered the cost of transporting produce between these towns. In addition, the government of Ahidjo extended the railway line which ended in Mbanga to Kumba which also reduced the price of transporting produce from Kumba to Douala. Businessmen as well as producers preferred the cheaper route and as such deprived Victoria of cargo intended for export.

The apparent decline in the activities of the port city had far reaching ramifications on the economy of that port city. It led to a corresponding decline in the number of workers employed as job boys at the port from 40,253 in 1971 to 18,757 in 1973 thereby making a net difference of

21,496 who went unemployed. Ngomba claims that it instead created surplus labor. This point is debatable. However, there was a reduction in wages from 11, 429,719 FRS to 6, 516, 470 FRS. Imports at the Victoria port dropped from 22,450 tons in 1971 to 8,597 tons in 1973 while exports dropped from 41,471 tons to 20,119.^{xxxiv}

Businesses were fast folding up. The social and economic report for the South West Province for the 1973/74 financial year noted that Victoria alone lost ten business enterprises out of 58 operating in West Cameroon to Douala because of poor business. The domination of businesses in Victoria by non-Cameroonians, especially the Ibo of Nigeria, had negative effects on Victoria. When the Victoria main shopping center was destroyed on 15 November 1972, with the loss of 300 million Francs CFA worth of merchandise, forty five stalls belonging to Nigerian traders were destroyed. This together with the dwindling economic atmosphere only added insult to injury and led to the mass exodus of Nigerian traders and their families from Victoria. Of course, this raised the issue of unemployment. By 1975, the euphoria of Victoria as a port city had considerably petered out. In 1980, the government went ahead to code-name it Limbe.

Conclusion

Victoria, which began as a religious city soon became a port city. As a port city it was connected and interconnected with other countries of the world. Through the port modern goods and modernity passed through to the hinterlands. The British colonial administration saw the need to construct a road which was to link Victoria and the hinterlands. The road had to pass through some of the key towns like Kumba and Mamfe. Through this road network, many people migrated to Victoria as well many goods which passed through the port to the hinterlands. In the 1940's Victoria was bustling with life. It was not only the imports and exports which had made it thus. It became a melting pot of many cultures. However, by the mid 1960's the once serious port city dwindled and petered out because of several issues examined in this essay.

Following the voices of the people who travelled to Victoria, the essay contends that port-city could not just be viewed in economic terms. This article contends that the social ramifications of its activities radiated far into the hinterlands and those who ventured to the port city were carriers of modernity to their villages. Thus, this article argues that migrants in the

Victoria port-city were conduits through which modernity reached various societies in the Cameroon hinterlands.

Endnotes

ⁱ Brian Hoyle, *Ports, port cities and coastal zones: development, interdependence and competition in East Africa* (Academie Royale Des Science D'outre-Mer, Bruxelles, 1997), 7

ⁱⁱ Ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Ayodeji Olukoju, *The Liveerpool of West Africa: The Dynamics and Impact of Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1900-1950* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004),4

^{iv} Ibid

^v John L. Comaroff, & Jean Comaroff (eds.) *Modernity and its malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), vii

^{vi} ibid

^{vii} For contested meanings of modernity see, James Ferguson, *Expectations of modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). Ajurn Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Peter Geschiere; Birgit Meyer & Peter Pels (eds) *Readings in modernity in Africa*.(Oxford: James Currey 2008); Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Globalisation*, (London: Macmillan, 1990); Elisio Salvado Macamo, (ed.) *Negotiating modernity: Africa's ambivalent experience*.(London: Zed Press, 2005); Jan-Georg Deutsch; Peter P.; & Heike S. (2002), *African Modernities: Entangled Meanings in Current Debates*. (Oxford: James Currey, 2002); Comaroff, & Comaroff (eds.) *Modernity and its malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

^{viii} Walter Gam Nkwi, *African Modernities and Mobilities: An Ethnographic History of Kom, Cameroon* (Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa Publishing and Common Initiative Group, 2015)

^{ix} V.G.Fanso, *Cameroon History for Secondary Schools and Colleges Vol. 2: From Colonial to Post Colonial Periods* (London: Macmillan, 1989)

^x Edward Bean Underhill, *Alfred Saker: Missionary to Africa: A Biography* (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press, 1958), 56

^{xi} For more on these plantations see Simon Joseph Epale, *Plantations and Development in Western Cameroon, 1885-1975: A Study in Agrarian Capitalism* (Los Angeles: Vantage Press, 1985)

^{xii} Cameroon was colonized by Germany in 1884 and during the First World War she was pushed out of the territory by an Anglo-French Force with Belgium acting as a backup. During the post world war deliberations, all German colonies were confiscated. Cameroon was then partitioned between France and Britain with the former taking 4/5 while the later took 1/5. This means that, the present Northwest and Southwest Regions of Cameroon fell under the British who administered it as part of Nigeria till 1961 when she got independence through reunification. For more on this see, Victor Julius Ngoh, *Southern Cameroons, 1922-1961: A Constitutional History* (Ashgate: Aldershot, 2001); Lovette Z. Elango, *The Anglo-French Condominium in Cameroon, 1914-1918: History of a Misunderstanding* (Limbe: Navi-Group Publications, 1987)

^{xiii} Neville Rubin, *Cameroon: An African Federation* (London: Pall Mall, 1971), 21-22

^{xiv} File Ba (1938) No. 2457 Cameroons Province : Notes for the League of Nations Report 1938 (National Archives Buea henceforth cited here as (NAB)

^{xv} Mathias Middell and Katia Naumann, “Global History and the Spatial Turn: From the impact of area studies to the Study of Critical junctions of Globalisation” *Journal of Global History* Vol.5, Issue 1 (2010): 149-170

^{xvi} Epale, *Plantations and Development in Western Cameroon, 1885-1975*, p.44.

^{xvii} Geoffrey L Baker. *Trade Winds on the Niger: Saga of the Royal Niger Company, 1830-1971*. (London: Radcliffe Press,1996); John Fage, Roberts Donnelly; Roland Anthony Oliver, *The Cambridge history of Africa*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 116

^{xviii} See File No.156/1930 Ce (1930) 1, Mamfe Division Annual Report 1930; File No. 177/1931, Ce (1931)1 Mamfe Division Annual Report; File No. (1934) 1, Mamfe Divisional Report, 1934; File No. 1781 Ce (1935) 1, Mamfe Division Annual Report

^{xix} Joseph B. Ebune, *The Growth of Political Parties in Southern Cameroons, 1916-1960* (Limbe: Presbook, 1992), 93

^{xx} Harry Rudin, *Germans in the Cameroons: A Study in Modern Imperialism* (Yale: Yale University Press), 237

^{xxi} Henry Kam Kah and Walter Gam Nkwi, “Human Lorries: Carriers in the British Southern Cameroon’s economy and re-ordering of road communication, 1916-c.1955” *Lagos Historical Review*, Vol.15 (2015): 17-38

^{xxii} File Rc 1956/2 Cameroons Road Programme Policy (NAB); Also see CO 583/248/11 Cameroon Report on Road Communication (PRO).

^{xxiii} File Qc (1960) Kenneth E. Berill to J.O. Fields, The Economy of the Southern Cameroons: A Report Submitted to J.O. Fields Commissioner of Southern Cameroons 25/August 1960 (NAB).

^{xxiv} File Ab 89 Cameroon under United Kingdom Administration Report for the Year 1958 (NAB)

^{xxv} File Qc (1960) Kenneth E. Berill to J.O. Fields, *The Economy of the Southern Cameroons: A Report Submitted to J.O. Fields Commissioner of Southern Cameroons 25/August 1960* (NAB).

^{xxvi} Interview with Peter Abahla, Belo, Kom, 28 July 2009

^{xxvii} Interview with Jerome Ngeh, Nkambe, Donga and Mantung Division, 17 June 2013

^{xxviii} Walter Gam Nkwi, *Kfaang and its technologies: Towards a social history of mobility in Kom, Cameroon, 1928-1998* (Leiden, The Netherlands: ASC Publications, 2011),1

^{xxix} Francis B. Nyamnjoh, “Images of Nyongo amongst Bamenda grassfielders in Whiteman Kontri” *Citizenship Studies*, Vol.9, No. 3 (2005):267

^{xxx} Barbara Weinstein, and Abel Ricardo Lopez, *The Making of the Middle Class: Towards a Transnational History of Middle Class.* (Duke: University of Duke Press, 2012)

^{xxxi} Benard Fonlon, “Will We Make or Mar” *Abbia*, Yaounde, March 1964.

^{xxxiii} The Douala Port had been well developed by the Germans and was taken over by the French. The Victoria port and Douala existed in Anglophone and Francophone sectors of the state respectively.

^{xxxiv} Ngomba, *The Fluctuating Fortunes of Victoria*, p. 332; Also see Simon Joseph Epale, *Social and Economic Report in the Southwest Province, 1973-74*(Buea, Cameroon: Government Printing Press, 1975), 29