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# Camwood (*Pterocarpus Tinctorius*) in the Political Economy of the Cross and Manyu Rivers Basin of Cameroon and Some Hinterland Communities, 1916-1961

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## Abstract

Camwood exploitation and use played an important role in the political economy of the Cross and Manyu river basin of Cameroon and Nigeria including some hinterland communities throughout the era of British administration which spanned 1916-1961. The British occasionally intervened to end its unrestricted exploitation and regulated its commercialisation for the local and external market. In spite of their laborious effort in this direction, Camwood exploitation continued for various internal and external uses.

## Résumé

L'exploitation et l'utilisation du Camwood ont joué un rôle important dans l'économie politique de la Région du bassin de la Cross River et du fleuve Manyu du Cameroun et du Nigeria, mais aussi certaines communautés de l'intérieur du pays tout au long de la colonisation britannique qui a duré de 1916 à 1961. Les Britanniques sont parfois intervenus pour mettre fin à son exploitation sauvage et réglementer sa commercialisation sur le marché local et extérieur. En dépit de leurs efforts laborieux, l'exploitation du camwood a continué pour satisfaire divers usages internes et externes.

## Introduction

African economies and resources that were hitherto independent of foreign domination systematically came under wanton exploitation by European economic interest groups during the colonial era. While some of these resources such as coffee, cocoa, cotton, banana and tea were introduced from other parts of the world into the continent, others like various species of wood, wild rubber, palm trees and kernels, and mineral resources were exploited from within Africa. Throughout the African continent, Europeans recklessly plundered the abundant natural resources for their industries back

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in Europe (Ajayi and Espie 1968; Duignan and Gann 1970; Rowlands 1979; Afigbo *et al.* 1986; Oliver and Atmore 1994; Shillington 1995; Ngoh 1996; Mazrui 1999; Aka 2002). Among the highly prized indigenous resources exploited by the British for example was camwood in the Cross River Region of Cameroon and Nigeria and other hinterland communities of British Southern Cameroons. Camwood is a reddish material that is extracted from the *Baphia nifida*, a leguminous tree, of the suborder *Caesalpinieae* camwood tree. The tree is of fine colour and used in tannery for making knife handles and other similar articles ([www.probertencyclopaedia.com/cgi.../res.pl?](http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/cgi.../res.pl?)). It was also used for wool-dyeing as in Liberia, festive occasions and in the production of other very costly cosmetics (Nkwi 1987; [www.jstor.org/stable/483540](http://www.jstor.org/stable/483540)).

This essay focuses on the significance of camwood, a scarce but valuable resource in the Cross and Manyu river basin and beyond. It also examines the problems and ramifications of camwood exploitation in this region during the era of British colonial rule from when the Germans were defeated in the First World War of 1914-16 and forced out of Cameroon.

### **Importance of Camwood among the Cross River and Other Communities**

The importance of camwood in the history of the Cross River and some hinterland communities as well as other African communities dates back to the pre-colonial era. This resource was economically important to the Nkum traders of Nigeria, British merchants and the indigenous people during the colonial period. Prior to colonial rule, hunters from Keaka or Ejagha country used camwood to decorate stones of the *Obassi* altar. This was meant to solicit good luck from the spirits during hunting expeditions. Besides, Boki men in Nigeria and Cameroon went to the *Olum* family shrine with their feet rubbed with camwood as a cleansing device. The rubbing of stones at the *Obassi* altar with camwood was a cleansing ritual and hunters used it as a form of motivation during their numerous hunting expeditions. Women in the many ethnic groups of the Cross River and some hinterland communities rubbed their bodies with the red powder to keep clean and smooth. Children were also made to accompany their parents to the family shrine dressed with necklaces of palm leaves and their bodies rubbed with camwood.<sup>1</sup> Family members used it for cleansing and purification purposes.

The traditional priest in the Cross river basin of Cameroon and Nigeria used camwood in the *Olum* family shrine for anointment of other people. Also in this region, nursing mothers were rubbed with camwood when they were about to deliver to smooth their bodies and to eventually deter men from going to bed with them when they were nursing and breast feeding

their babies. The importance of camwood was not only for purification but also fertility rites, anointment, and a symbol of command and authority. In many Ejagha villages across the Cameroon/Nigeria boundary, women dancers of the *nchi* or *manchung* danced following the death of important personalities dressed up in mat ruffles. This included camwood which became a noticeable recognition of their status and authority.<sup>2</sup> In the Mundani region of the Cross River basin, girls, marriageable and married women were rubbed with camwood and a barren woman was given a plantain rolled in pounded camwood which she kept by her bed to guarantee fecundity.<sup>3</sup>

The importance attached to camwood in the Bangwa polities became manifest during the death of a Chief or prominent family head. Their wives were rubbed with the relish.<sup>4</sup> Such a ritual also took place in the Laimbwe polities of Bu, Mbengkas and Baisso in Menchum Division of the North West Region of Cameroon during the coronation of a new *fuai* (Chief), *zhehfuai* (Queen Mother), *zheh'abei* (Family Head) and when the *kefa'a* women regulatory society performed at a funeral or when its new member was being initiated into the society of elderly women. The women shaved their heads which were rubbed with camwood as well as their cylindrical instruments which produced the music. Among the Kom, Aghem and Bu of the North West Region of the country, the initiation of a new member into the *dua* or *chong* (*tschong*) was never complete if he was not rubbed with camwood. He was considered cleansed from his own iniquities and born into a new life in manhood. Besides, in many of the grassland fondoms of the North West Region, camwood served as rubbing oil because it smoothed and kept the body warm. The condiment also signified authority and was often used to send away evil spirits in the different communities. Among the Laimbwe for instance, the communication officers or spokespersons of the *kuiifuai* male regulatory society, *tsitenduoh*, addressed and continue to address the population with camwood marks on their foreheads.<sup>5</sup>

Still among the Laimbwe and Kom polities of the grassfields of Cameroon, camwood is used to make peace and ensure prosperity. The resource is also used in healing rituals. During traditional wedding ceremonies, young women are washed and rubbed with camwood to cleanse them of any impurities and initiate them into womanhood. Nursing mothers are also rubbed with camwood to keep their bodies soft and smooth. Barren women go through this ritual with the hope of attracting the sympathy of God to be able to eventually give birth to children.<sup>6</sup> The Moghamo people during the colonial period stole camwood from the border communities of the Banyang country for various traditional uses in male and female societies. Among the different uses of camwood among the Moghamo was for purification rites, births and the

protection of individuals from evil spirits.<sup>7</sup> Their clandestine exploitation of this resource in the forests of the Banyang-speaking polities was often a source of inter-ethnic tension which intermittently abated after traditional diplomatic negotiations between these Banyang polities and those of the Moghamo people.

In many other grassland chiefdoms, camwood was an important commodity which was very often used during different ritual and initiation ceremonies. Traders of different commodities like palm kernels and mats often returned home with a good quantity of camwood for their wives and female relations (Rowlands 1979:9). They used it as rubbing oil or for initiation rituals. The Nkwen traders for instance who exchanged their locally made hoes for oil in Meta country went on to obtain camwood from Bali which came all the way from Widikum, an important camwood market at the borders of the then Mamfe and Bamenda Divisions of British Southern Cameroons. Meanwhile in the Nso slave markets of the western grassfields, the heads of slaves were shaved and rubbed with camwood by different slave dealers for easy identification and sale to slave merchants coming from far and near (Nkwi 1987:108-9, 118, 122 & 123).

In addition, during the British colonial era spanning from 1916 to 1961, camwood came to be a highly prized resource because of the revenue derived from it by Nkum traders and other local stakeholders. They exploited and sold it to waiting customers at a very high cost.<sup>8</sup> The importance of camwood as an export commodity of greater importance was not limited to the Cross River region of Cameroon and Nigeria and some hinterland communities but also Sierra Leone as observed by Walter Rodney ([www.marxists.org/subject/africa/rodney-walter/.../cho3.htm](http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/rodney-walter/.../cho3.htm)). Between 1916 and 1922, many inhabitants of the Cross river transported the valuable commodity through the Manyu and Cross Rivers to Ikom and Calabar but the British described this as a smuggling activity. While the local inhabitants and their Nkum traders profited from the trade to Ikom and Calabar, the colonial economy witnessed a considerable leakage in monetary terms because the colonial authorities hardly received anything from this transportation of the resource along the river to important commercial centres like Calabar.<sup>9</sup>

Throughout the colonial epoch, the British colonial authorities tried to raise money from the exploitation of camwood by asking for a charge for permits granted to exploiters who officially indicated their willingness to exploit the resource. The aim of insisting on permits was also a way to regulate the irrational exploitation of this tree that was of value to many people. In Kembong and the Takamanda Native Court areas of the Cross River basin, the village authorities asked and received from buyers of

camwood a fee of 1/-. It was only then that these exploiters were given a paper which permitted them to fell the camwood trees.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth noting that the British forest policy was designed primarily to serve their vested interests in Southern Cameroons. As late as 1958, the chief duty of the Forest Department was to acquire, protect and manage the forest estates through constant patrols and to adequately maintain the boundaries. Although the colonial authorities recognised the importance of agriculture for both the indigenous people and the colonial economy, they still embarked on a policy of keeping permanent forest that once in place could not be destroyed. The indigenous population in many parts of British Southern Cameroons opposed this forest policy but every effort was made by the colonial authorities to constitute the remaining valuable accessible forest areas as part of the permanent forest estate. They argued that keeping a permanent forest would be used to satisfy the peoples' requirements of forest produce and also to raise maximum possible revenue (Cameroons 1959:140-1). The quest for a permanent forest led to friction between forestry officials and different indigenous communities of British Southern Cameroons. This policy created more problems in the Cross River region where there was an abundance of forest with a lot of exploitable forest resources like camwood but which was subjected to government control.

Meanwhile in the Mbo area, which was a little further way from the Cross River basin, the indigenous people continued to collect the roots of the camwood tree and sell them to waiting buyers from the grassland of Cameroon. In Matene, Matene Magbi and Badschama, villages of the Assumbo area, including Ovando, the people exploited the camwood tree for money from the numerous customers coming in from the grassland region who needed it for several traditional reasons.<sup>11</sup> While indigenes of these villages made a fortune out of the sale of camwood, those of Otutu in the Menka District did not get as much from the resource because they were only able to sell smaller quantities of the *pterocarpus tinctorius*.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, the British colonial authorities tried to preserve the resource from uncontrolled exploitation because of its increasing economic value. The economic importance of camwood was not in doubt when the District Officer for Mamfe on 20 December 1941 remarked that 'The Camwood trade is quite important in this Division (Mamfe) and I should welcome any measures that would prevent its dislocation.'<sup>13</sup> In fact, the different colonial officials promoted a policy of rational exploitation of camwood in the Cross River basin for the benefit of their merchants stationed at Calabar. It was also to enable exploiters to pay a forestry fee to the forestry department.

The Nkum traders from Ikom Division in Nigeria turned out to be the greatest beneficiaries in the commercialisation of camwood. They were the principal buyers of large quantities of this commodity in the Ekwe District and from 1916 onwards in a way promoted its 'clandestine' exploitation. They were able to do this with great success because Britain had taken over the administration of Southern Cameroons after the defeat of the Germans and the partition of Cameroon between them and the French. These Nkum traders later sold the resource to European merchants in the Cross River markets of Nigeria for a huge profit. Each billet sold at 6d in Cameroon but stood at 3/- and 5/- in Nigerian markets. The Nkum also extended business tentacles into Boki territory South and South West of Bashi. For every 56 billets of camwood roots supplied by the Bokis, the Nkum business operators paid them 12 shillings.<sup>14</sup> Other indigenous Boki, Eba Mbu and Ekokisam traders carried the camwood roots downstream together with other commodities and sold them at Akataka near Obubra or at Oburu near Afikpo. A few itinerant traders from Nsanakang and Nsanarati also got involved in the purchase and sale of camwood. From the sale of its roots alone, a trader made a £5-10 profit.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the sale of camwood exploited from their forest to Nigeria, the Nyang, Eastern Banyang and Biteku people sold it to the Bangwa and Bali who had great need for it during traditional festive and other important occasions.

Throughout the colonial period camwood like other resources became important to different people. The trunk of the tree was used to build canoes and facilitate trade in camwood and other commodities like salt, palm kernels and oil along the Manyu and Cross rivers to and from Ikom and Calabar in Nigeria. Camwood was used by the villages of Akwa and Mbu of the Mbulu ethnic group and Nyang and Mukonyong of the Banyang area to make dye. This was not limited to these communities because the people of the region from Senegal to Angola also used it as a red dye ([www.jstor.org/stable/483540](http://www.jstor.org/stable/483540)). The Mbo people of Mamfe Division also combined camwood with leaves of the *esere* bean to produce dye.<sup>16</sup> The mad rush for camwood by the Nkum traders was a result of pressure from the Ikom markets for its red powder for sale to Europeans, desperately in need of the resource. The Boki exploited and marketed camwood to the Calabari and other merchants who in turn used it to manufacture cosmetics. In the midst of these benefits, the government stepped in to systematise its exploitation and commercialisation for sustainability.

### **Government Systematisation of Camwood Exploitation and Commercialisation**

On account of the value that was attached to camwood by the different stakeholders involved in its exploitation, use and commercialisation, the government came in to systematise its exploitation and sale. Other episodes that spurred the government to action included the impact of the First World War, the Economic Slump of 1929, the Second World War and the flow of trade in commodities like kernels and goats from parts of British Southern Cameroons towards French Cameroon notably Dschang, Melong and Nkongsamba.

The British colonial officials roundly condemned what they called smuggling of camwood. By 1922, camwood ‘smuggling’ was so rampant that the more profit smugglers made, the more the colonial economy was deprived of money from camwood trade because this was not controlled by the government. Another deterrent measure employed by the colonial officials to prevent what they considered as irrational exploitation of camwood was to demand from interested exploiters and/or buyers a forestry fee and the payment of royalties to the communities where camwood was being exploited. The huge amount of money that was levied on permits for those willing to fell the camwood contributed towards raising some money for the colonial treasury. This responsibility was not limited to the government but included the Native Authority (NA) councils of the Cross River area. These were to ensure that permits were obtained by exploiters following the right procedure before they were allowed to exploit the camwood resource. The forestry fee for camwood was 1:1:- for 56 billets. The following year, permits for camwood exploitation stood at £132.<sup>17</sup> The enforcement of this forestry fees was also a subtle way to ensure the protection of certain trees and exercise control on the fairly large destruction of camwood. Table 1 illustrates the forestry fees and royalties for camwood for the period January to December 1926 in the Mamfe, Nsanakang and Basho areas.

**Table 1:** Schedule of Forestry Fees and Royalties, January to December 1926

Month	Name and class of tree camwood3/cl £	Fees paid into local treasury £	Royalties paid into native treasury £	Area where permits were issued
January	2	13	-	-
February	6	17	-	-
March	5	5	6	Mamfe
April	4	6	4	-
May	3	3	18	-
June	10	10	-	Nsanakang
July	21	13	9	-
August	24	5	17	-
September	12	2	15	Basho
October	25	5	10	-
November	8	19	18	-
December	12	12	12	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>109</b>	-

**Source:** Cameroons Province 1924, File No. 37/24, Qh/a (1924) 1, National Archives Buea (NAB)

From this table, the total number of camwood exploited as indicated in the official sources alone from January to December 1926 was 132. The actual number was certainly far more than this considering the illegal exploitation of this scarce resource in the entire Mamfe Division especially in the Basho area by the indigenous population and other smugglers from across the boundary in Nigeria. Such illegal exploitation was never accounted for and so could not be included in the official statistics presented by the government in the three main exploitation areas. The amounts that were paid into the local and native treasuries by recognised exploiters within these twelve months stood at £110 and £109 respectively for the same period. The only areas where exploiters could go for permits for camwood exploitation were Mamfe,



Nsanakang and Basho. In fact, the regulation of the exploitation of this tree by the colonial government and the different native authorities yielded positive results in some areas although the challenges of exploitation without government approval continued unabated.

In 1927 forestry fees and royalties were also paid into the treasuries for the exploitation of camwood. Table 2 illustrates the statistics in terms of the name and class of the camwood tree, the fees paid into the local treasury in pounds, royalties paid into the native treasury in pounds and the main areas of exploitation of the resource from January to October of that year.

**Table 2:** Schedule of Forestry Fees and Royalties, January to 17 October 1927

Month	Name and class of tree camwood <sup>3</sup> /cl £	Fees paid into local treasury £	Royalties paid into native treasury £	Area where permits were issued
January	3	3	4	-
February	3	13	1	-
March	3	4	17	Mamfe
April	1	11	9	-
May	6	16	19	Nsanakang
June	19	19	14	-
July	8	8	8	-
August	32	12	18	-
September	19	19	14	Basho
October	14	15	3	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>107</b>	-

**Source:** Forestry: Cameroons Province 1924, File No. 37/24, Qh/a (1924) 1, (NAB)

Of the different classes of exploitable forest trees like iroko, camwood and ebony that fetched an income for the local and native treasuries, camwood was the most regular in the Cross River region of Cameroon and Nigeria. Of the total number of the trees that were exploited in the Cross River basin between January and 17 October 1927, 108 of these were camwood according

to official sources in Mamfe, Nsanakang and Basho where permits were issued to exploiters. The total amount that was paid into the local treasury for the exploitation of this number of camwood trees was £120 and £107 was paid into the native treasury during the same period. Of this amount, part of it was deposited into the local treasury by the native authorities to support government action and other development initiatives in the different NA areas.

Meanwhile, one other measure that was taken to regulate illegal camwood exploitation and marketability was the employment and stationing of forestry guards in areas where camwood exploitation was clandestinely carried out. This measure was heavily enforced in the villages bordering the Bamenda Division of British Southern Cameroons. The Moghamo villages for instance 'stole' camwood from the neighbouring villages of the Banyang country. Some other neighbouring Bamenda villages plundered the resource in the forest areas of Mbome, Mashi, Kepoti, Fumbe, Sabes and Mango Pongo village groups.<sup>18</sup> The Native Administration of this area took up the challenge and stationed forest guards in the affected villages to arrest these culprits from the Bamenda Division.

In other areas notably Ewisi and Kesham in the Akwaya area, about 50 camwood trees according to official sources were felled annually especially between 1923 and 1924. To prohibit the rate at which the tree was exploited in this area, the colonial officials admonished the Native Administration to ensure its protection without which the tree would be extinct.<sup>19</sup> It was indeed the responsibility of the Native Administration to employ many more guards to fight against the uncontrolled exploitation of camwood especially for commercial purposes by indigenous people as well as others coming from up the Cross River.

When the demand for camwood exploitation increased in the different areas where the resource was in abundance, the colonial officials were quick to limit its exploitation to dead and fallen trees only. This could only partially satisfy some ethnic groups and villages notably Akwa and Mbu of the Mbulu area, Nyang and Mukonyong of the Banyang area and Widekum but not all of them.<sup>20</sup> Besides, those who were engaged in the exploitation of the tree had them stamped with the forest mark by the guards to ensure compliance. Any camwood that did not bear these marks was considered illegally exploited and thus confiscated by forest guards and disposed of by the colonial government. Some of the 'smuggled' camwood was openly sold to the people of villages of Bamenda Division that bordered those of Mamfe Division. The sale more often than not took place at the important border market of

Widikum.<sup>21</sup> It was therefore very difficult for the government to successfully prevent people from the exploitation and use of this resource which was even more useful to the people than it was to the colonial administration.

The colonial and Native Administration officials occasionally objected to the issue of forestry licenses. This was when some unscrupulous licence holders embarked on the reckless exploitation and exportation of camwood and in the making of canoes far beyond the quantity they were permitted to exploit. Meanwhile camwood which was located in virgin forest in the Anyang territory was exploited by the people without restriction by the government for a long time probably also because of the difficulty of communication. Besides, for a long time, the camwood tree was still in abundance in this area and the British were still to effectively put in place control mechanisms.<sup>22</sup> Following the eventual putting in place of an effective if not efficient mechanism to regulate camwood exploitation and exportation by the colonial officials, the repercussions on the political economy of the Manyu and Cross River basin as well as other hinterland communities that relied on camwood supply from the Cross River region was disheartening.

### **Ramifications on the Political Economy of Camwood Regulation**

Throughout the colonial period, the regulation of camwood exploitation and marketability had a ripple effect on the political economy of the Manyu/Cross River basin and other hinterland communities of Southern Cameroons and Nigeria in several ways. The 'smuggling' of camwood for commercialisation in the Bamenda villages and to the Nkum traders by indigenous people of the Cross River was the result of restrictions on the free exploitation of the camwood tree as was hitherto the case. The situation got to the point where forest guards were posted to the areas of illegal exploitation to keep this resource more or less intact.<sup>23</sup> The posting of forest guards to the Moghamo area did not deter the villagers from 'smuggling' camwood from the neighbouring Banyang villages where camwood was in abundance. These villagers had a mastery of the terrain and used this to outsmart the forest guards. They were also bent on exploiting the resource for traditional use. Besides, other neighbouring Bamenda villages wrestled with the inhabitants of Mbome, Mashi, Kepoti, Fumbe, Sabes and Mongo Pongo as they continued to exploit camwood in their forests without any approval and with such reckless abandon.

Smuggling was accentuated by the establishment of forest reserves such as the Takamanda and the Mawne River Native Administration Forest. The indigenous communities were prevented from freely collecting camwood and other resources within these reserves as was the case before their

establishment. Faced with this difficulty, the village council of Nyang met at Eshobi to encourage the Native Administration to permit the villagers to have free access into the Mawne River Native Administration Forest Reserve to exploit what they considered as their God-given resource. Similarly, the Akwa and Mbu villages solicited the authorities to also permit them to exploit camwood for local use and commercialisation.<sup>24</sup> The establishment of the Takamanda Forest Reserve hindered the exploitation of camwood by the Boki people of Cameroon and Nigeria for sale in the Nigerian markets notably Calabar. As long as the administration did not allow the different village communities to exploit the resource without seeking its permission, the people devised other strategies of exploiting the resource without being caught. These included exploitation at night and the development of trade routes which were different from those officially recognised by the government.

Although permits were occasionally issued to people to procure forestry licences, some licence owners exploited the *pterocarpus tinctorius* to near extinction because they did not respect the terms of their permits which limited them to the exploitation of a certain number of trees. When this happened, the colonial authorities were forced to withdraw licences from these culprits in an attempt to protect the sustainable management of this resource for their future benefit. The licences issued in the Mamfe Division of British Southern Cameroons were however different from royalties to chiefs and/or villages as was the case in Nigeria. The chiefs and villages of this highly prized commodity in most cases did not reap any substantial benefits from its exploitation. According to them, the licences needed to be jointly issued in order to facilitate the receipt of royalties for the development of their villages.<sup>25</sup> Since the colonial government was reticent on this, many of the chiefs were not keen on whether exploiters had licences or not because they reaped little or nothing from these licences.

The payment of money for the exploitation of camwood however remained a serious bone of contention throughout the period of British colonial administration. Since the colonial administration could not forever be indifferent to the grievances of the people, the Secretary of the Southern Provinces in Lagos discussed it with the Resident of the Cameroons Province. The result was a memo sent to the Resident, which advised that the matter should not be pushed too hard because it would 'cause trouble, expense and exasperation.'<sup>26</sup> In fact, many were those who had before British rule exploited camwood without external interference. During British colonial rule, 'smuggling' became extremely rampant. The people were forced to smuggle camwood because they needed it to augment their family revenue and also to continue to perform specific socio-cultural rituals that could not take place

without the use of camwood. They did not have a substitute for camwood and so could hardly improvise.

Meanwhile on 20 April 1928, the District Officer for Mamfe energetically sounded the warning bell that restrictions on the sale of camwood would be strongly resented by the indigenous people. Seventeen days later, that is, on 7 May 1928, the Resident allowed the District Officer to permit the felling of camwood, but only if the tree was in large quantity in the forests of the Cross River region.<sup>27</sup> Political considerations such as these on economic matters were intended to create an atmosphere of camaraderie in the management of resources. Their implementation was another ball game altogether.

Besides, people who were caught felling the protected tree were arrested, beaten and locked up. In one such instance, a defaulter was arrested by a guard Ndip Enoh who in turn attacked him. The culprit was eventually tried and sentenced to a fine of £20 or two months imprisonment.<sup>28</sup> This episode was considered as an abomination to a people who before the colonial intervention exploited their God-given resource without any strings attached to it. Similarly, on 27 November 1930, the District Officer for Mamfe summoned Echu of Amebesu to appear in court for felling two camwood trees in contravention of the permission to fell only one.<sup>29</sup> The fate of Tenche Nakakwo and Tambe Awa of Tafu hanged on a thread because they had been implicated in illegal exploitation of camwood by the colonial officials. The District Officer commanded that all camwood felled should be confiscated and taken to Mamfe.<sup>30</sup> These measures created problems between the colonial officials and the local population throughout the colonial period.

Furthermore, the presence of the Nkum traders in almost all corners of the Manyu and Cross River basin for camwood and its regulated exploitation made the availability of the red powder for local use scarce. Besides, hunters increasingly found it difficult to use camwood in their shrines, unlike before. Initiation into regulatory societies like the *ekpe* gradually became expensive because of the competition for the available scarce camwood which was used at different stages of initiation of new members and also by old members. Other substitutes with a red colouring were eventually sought. A good number of the Nkum traders always bought large quantities of camwood to meet the demand in the Ikom and Calabar markets. Cosmetic industries in Calabar needed much of the camwood to be able to meet the demand of their customers.

## Conclusion

Camwood was one of those natural resources that meant and still mean much to the people of the Manyu, Cross River and other hinterland communities of Cameroon and Nigeria. It was and is still used in homes, by herbalists, shrines, in juju and masquerade societies and on many cultural and festive occasions that are organised once a year. It was a trade commodity that was used for red powder, dyeing and other cosmetics. Considering the multiple uses of camwood, many people wanted to procure a quantity of it. When the British stepped in to regulate and/or prohibit its exploitation, many of the indigenous people grew furious. Many communities however circumvented the regulations put in place and were always ready to bear the consequences. Camwood then became an economic resource that not only influenced economic activities in this region and beyond but also the political decisions of the indigenous people and the colonial officials. All these came to affect the people's possession and use of camwood in the Cross River basin and beyond. Today, many different male and especially female societies use camwood in their initiation and other rituals but this is being purchased from distant places at an enormous cost. Others are seeking alternatives that are also expensive to get. This is the dilemma of the people after many years of subjugation that resulted in what we now see as a challenge to be surmounted.

## Notes

1. File No. 115/1927, Af 27, Keaka Tribal Area Mamfe Division Assessment of, National Archives Buea (NAB); File No 1592/26, Af 24, Boki Eba-Mbu and Ekokisam Assessment Report, NAB.
2. File No. 115/1927, Af 27, Keaka Tribal Area Mamfe Division Assessment of, NAB.
3. File No. 267, Af 49, Intelligence Report on the Mundani Area of the Mamfe Division of the Cameroons Province, NAB.
4. This is a practice which was never neutralized by colonialism because in many fondoms today the practice goes on.
5. Interview with Salome Kaifetai, Kasa Quarter Bu, 15 May 2004, who was Queen Mother. Meanwhile Laimbwe consists of villages speaking a common language and a common heritage. The three main villages are Bu, Mbengkas and Baisoo.
6. Interview with Mami Ngoisei and Mbei Ikai, Kasa Quarter Bu, 15 May 2004; Walter Gam Nkwi, Molyko Buea, 10 June 2004; Vida Wei Chou, Bomaka Buea, 7 October 2006. Mami Ngoisei and Mbei Ikai are very influential members of the women regulatory society, the *Kefa'a*, in Bu; Walter Gam Nkwi is a lecturer of history at the University of Buea and hails from Njinikom, Kom, and Vida Wei is from one of the royal families of Bu, the Ehzem and daughter of another prominent family, the Eselemei.
7. File No. 11346, Qh/d 1941/2, Camwood, NAB.

8. No statistics exist in the archives but reference is constantly made to its increased commercial value under the British colonial administration.
9. File No. 868/1923, Ce (1922) 1, Mamfe Annual Report 1922, NAB.
10. File No. 11346, Qh/d 1941/2, Camwood, NAB.
11. File No. 1469/23, Af 31, Mbo Tribe Mamfe Division Cameroons Province, 1923. Assessment Report on, NAB; File No. 124/31, Af 7, Reassessment Report on the Assumbo District Mamfe Division 1931, NAB.
12. File No. 411/21, Af 37, An Assessment Report on the Menka District of the Mamfe Division in the Cameroons Province 1924, NAB.
13. File No. 11346, Qh/d 1941/2, Camwood, NAB.
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