



## Challenging Patriarchy

Trade, outward migration and the internationalization of Commercial sex among Bayang and Ejagham women in Southwest Cameroon.

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## Abstract

This paper documents the specific local and global social and economic forces that led to the outward migration of Bayang and Ejagham women to work as commercial sex workers on the Cameroon-Nigeria border regions in the 1980s and 1990s. It demonstrates that these women's personal accumulation strategies are adaptive- drawing on time and space specific modes of capitalist accumulation and kinship systems of power. The intertwined nature of these forms of accumulation shows that patriarchal forms of power and capitalist forms of accumulation in this region were not competitive-but rather complementary systems. This conjuncture also gave women the latitude to claim some form of sexual and economic agency, usefully suggesting that at least in Africa, patriarchy as a power field is dynamic and relational, simultaneously opening up spaces for both resistance and agency. Although the impact of sex work has been disproportionate since most women were involved in subsistence sex and given the risk of violence and of contracting HIV/AIDS, they however reconfigured gender relations, but have not achieved liberation as most remain trapped in poverty.

**Keywords:** *commercial sex; capitalist accumulation; patriarchy; power; agency; HIV/AIDS.*

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Ngambouk Vitalis Pemunta<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

Critical Western and African feminist scholars have increasingly called attention to the need to situate the life worlds of “Third World Women” in history, and not to universalize women’s social conditions globally by presenting them as universal victims with little agency<sup>2</sup>. African feminists have also called for the historical contextualization of African women’s lives within their own local, social, economic and political life worlds<sup>3</sup>. These scholars articulate the capacity for resistance of these “Third World Women” and the need for scholarly analysis of the multiple workings of power since patriarchy is not monolithic. This qualitative study examines the juggling of trans-border trade and commercial sex work among women from the patriarchal Bayang and Ejagham ethnicities of Southwest Cameroon in the 1980s and 1990s. It argues for the situated agency of these ‘deviant’ women who in the face of multiple economic downturns, refused the status of “victimhood” imposed upon them by the collusion between patriarchy and the capitalist economic system. Instead, they creatively carved out a space for the enactment of their individual and collective agency, challenging and reconfiguring existing gendered norms of femininity and womanhood in the face of overwhelming, community pressure to marry.

## II. Research Methodology and Theoretical framework

This paper focuses on the complex mix of trans-local and indigenous forces that led to the massive exodus of Bayang and Ejagham women in the decades of the 1980s and 1990s to serve as commercial sex workers. I argue that sex work as a means of personal accumulation is adaptive, and drawing on time and space specific modes of capitalist accumulation and kinship systems of power, showing that patriarchal forms of power and capitalist forms of accumulation are complementary. Despite this conjuncture, women carved out a space for the enactment of their

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1 Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Central European University, Hungary

2Lila Abu-Lughod. “The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women.” *American Ethnologist* (1990):1:41-55,ChandraTalpadeMohanty,. Under western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses. In *Third World women and the politics of feminism*. Eds. Chandra TalpadeMohanty, Russo Ann, and Torres Lourdes, 51–80.(Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

3Ife Amadiume. *Male daughters, female husbands: Gender and sex in an African society*. (London: Zed Books, 1987).,Oyeronke Oyewumi. *The invention of women: Making an African sense of Western gender Discourses*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

sexual and economic agency, suggesting that even within patriarchy, there is the possibility for both resistance and agency. This is despite the minimal benefits of sex work and commercial sex, but the high risk of exposure to violence and HIV/AIDS which has led to the breakdown of traditional support mechanisms and increased demand for orphan care and support for the elderly.

The AIDS scourge orchestrated a moral panic, deep intergenerational conflicts, social chaos, intense contestation and debates over female sexual morality. Women consequently became moral icons of their community. As the most explicit way of policing female sexuality, conservatives among the Ejaghams presented ritual female circumcision as a useful ‘antidote’ to the HIV/AIDS threat. Progressives sooner pointed to the harmful health effects, particularly bloodletting, as likely to fuel the spread of the pandemic. Against this backdrop of contestation and accentuated intergenerational conflicts over cultural values and practices, engendered by cash and transformation, our field research explored trans-border trade and sex work as one of women’s survival strategies given the feminization of poverty in this community.

A variety of ethnographic methods proved important to the intention and value of our study: individual in-depth interviews; focus group and informal discussion sessions; case studies; reminiscences of individuals who were either cross border ‘traders’, or who bore witness to these activities; casual and participant observation and historical processual analysis were all utilized as research tools for the eliciting of data from participants. As Michael Burawoy rightly notes, this extended case study strategy is capable of highlighting the discrepancies between normative prescriptions and everyday practices that can be traced to internal contradictions “but also to the intrusion of colonialism’, usefully calling for the need to move from the “micro” to the “macro” and ‘to connect the present to the past’<sup>4</sup>. Additionally, it permitted me to incorporate the wider context by taking into account the influence of the local, national, regional and international political and economic context, grounding lived experience within its extra-local variables. In this case, the micro-structures of everyday life, which is under women’s control, constitute the foundation and invisible premise for the microstructures controlled by men<sup>5</sup>.

This implies taking cognizance of gendered socio-economic changes at the global, regional and national scales, their impact on intergenerational relations, on women and their sexuality but above all, on cultural change at the local level. Rather than opting for a single case study to answer the research questions, a multiple case study was preferred, involving one ethnicity, the Ejaghams, but extending out to the Bayangs so as to provide greater latitude and context while simultaneously providing for a much more nuanced approach. Robert Yin notes, on this point, that “the difference between single and multiple–case study designs are variants that ‘operate within the same case study strategy.’<sup>6</sup>”

A qualitative research strategy was thus adopted owing to the exploratory nature of the research questions and to enable a research framework sensitive to the natural environment and socio-cultural realities (‘ecological validity’).<sup>7</sup>

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4 Michael Burawoy. ‘The Extended Case Method’. *Sociological Theory* (1998):16:4-33. American Sociological Association P.5

5 Dorothy Smith. *The everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

6 Robert Yin. *K. Case Study Research, Second Edition*, (Newbury, CA: Sage, 1994)., .44

7 Graham Vulliamy. *The Potential of Qualitative Educational Research Strategies in Developing Countries*. In Vulliamy Graham, KM Lewis and D Stephens, 1990: *Doing Educational Research in Developing Countries: Qualitative Strategies*. (London: The Falmer Press, 1990), .12.

Having worked among the Ejaghams as an HIV/AIDS educator for the NGO Noble Social Group, I was familiar with some of the ‘gatekeepers’ and key informants who had demonstrated their willingness to be part of the study. Many have taken issue with the purposive sampling method in case study research on grounds that such research is no more concerned with generalization through representative sampling as with the generation of theoretical insights.<sup>8</sup> I believe, however, that an attempt be made in qualitative studies to consider the extent to, and conditions under which findings from a given number of cases studied can resonate on the smaller, if not wider population of cases from which the samples were drawn. In this regard, I opted to work in one ethnicity-the Ejaghams-meeting the criteria of familiarity, proximity and willingness.

Access was granted to the research sites; confidentiality and rapport was previously established with gatekeepers. My affiliation to a Western academic institution nevertheless had its psychological reality and historical shadow, portraying me as an agent of neo-colonialism. Furthermore, it cannot be ruled out that a reaction to the people’s marginality in the incessant Western-led global debate on female circumcision, is not an unusual phenomenon. But, my insider/outsider status – Cameroonian from a different culture, African and age – gave me the leverage to ask and be provided with as much information as possible. To dispense with ‘researcher’-‘researched’ hierarchies and divides with participants, I was empathetic from the outset of the research that their perceptions and experiences needed to take precedence.

Information was voluntarily and successfully abstracted from a total of 273 respondents between February and October 2006 using both English and Pidjin English. Of this number, 40 respondents were former trans-border “business women”(entrepreneurs and sex workers simultaneously, 20 in total) with 20 others still active in the trade. I combined snow-ball and purposive sampling by projecting the role certain respondents were likely to serve in the study<sup>9</sup>. Similarly, Burns notes that purposive sampling is useful if it “serves the real purpose and objectives of the researcher by enabling him to discover, gain insight and understanding into a particular phenomenon”<sup>10</sup>. However, to a limited extent the selection of these 40 respondents was based on the ‘sampling logic’ or “those that are representative of the total population of similar cases”<sup>11</sup>.

Field notes and tape recording went on simultaneously. Tape-recorded interviews were transcribed as soon as possible in the field and usually within 48 hours and coded using CSAC Content Codes to create meta categories in field notes based on the content, followed by an abstract for every note<sup>12</sup>. In keeping with my case study strategy, I identified themes, patterns and processes, commonalities and differences<sup>13</sup>. I however agree that making sense of lessons learned is shaped by my experiences and background, which is biographically important to research<sup>14</sup>. Generally, analysis was carried out at two levels: (1) ‘individual-case analysis’-involving the identification of patterns, consistencies and differences in what was observed, obtained from subject interviews, focus group discussion sessions with gender and status within the social structure. and, (2) ‘cross case analysis’ in which-individual cases were compared, similarities and differences of opinion identified and possible explanations were generated<sup>15</sup>.

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8 Robert. Yin K. Case Study Research. Design and Methods, (London: Sage, 1989).

9 Russell Bernard. Research Methods in Anthropology. Qualitative and Quantitative approaches. (Alta Mira Press, 2006)., 189.

10 Robert Burns. . Introduction to Research Methods, 4th Ed, (Sage., 2000),.465

11Yin, Case Study Research , 47

12Michael Fischer, Kortendick Oliver, and David Zeitlyn. (CSAC Monographs14.Canterbury, 1996)

13Anne Edwards, and Robin Talbot. The Hard-pressed Researcher, (New York: Longman, 1994), 45.

14Yvonna Lincoln, Egon Guba. Naturalistic Inquiry, (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1985),.194

15Robert Stake. The Art of Case Study Research, (Sage, 1995).

### III. Sex work and commercial sex

Whereas “Sex work” involves both the temporal and long term sale of sexual services and the creation of eroticized relationships for material accumulation, commercial sex work is ‘the sale of sexual intimacy’<sup>16</sup>. This multi-faceted phenomenon Xochitl Castañeda and Associates maintain “is practiced by people of different genders, various ages, and different socio-economic strata and in varied context” Female participants in Mexico City like elsewhere, they further concede “live in a constant double bind: as mothers within the family, their activities are hidden from” scrutiny while the realm of professional commercial sex work, “is marked by a separation between daytime life as responsible mothers and nighttime professional life when they deny themselves desire and pleasure”<sup>17</sup>. The lives of Bayang and Ejagham female trans-border traders and commercial sex workers are complex. While some juggle trading with sex work on a full time basis, some are full time while others part time sex workers with other statuses- students or maids. I am aware of anti-feminist objections against treating sex as ‘work’, but I nevertheless use ‘sex work’ to draw attention to the labor involved in these transactions so as to avoid the moral geographies bound up in the term ‘prostitution’. This is also a tacit recognition of female subjectivity and agency within the sex industry .Sex workers are capable of shaping the meaning of interactions during sexual transactions using ‘boundary markers’<sup>18</sup> so as to ensure only limited access to their bodies thereby undermining unilateral control by the client. Various scholars<sup>19</sup> have explored the fuzzy boundary between commercial sex work and intimate relationships. As a blanket term, “sex work” is characterized by a fuzzy boundary between gift and commodity, desire and economic calculation where “sexuality becomes part of a series of partly commodified and partly gift-like encounters”<sup>20</sup>. While some Bayang and Ejagham women turned these commercial encounters into social relationships eventually marrying their clients, others have given birth to children by their customers, and are continuously receiving care and financial assistance. This implies that commercial sex although largely about survival, is also about taking advantage of opportunities and accumulating social capital from these encounters for the future. Mark Hunter recognizes the widespread link between gifts, sex and social relations that cut across both local and western definitions of ‘prostitution’ – the usual thrust of studies on the materiality of non-material sex and a frequent explanatory factor for the rapid spread of AIDS.<sup>21</sup>

Writing on prostitution on Thailand for instance, Thanh-dam Troung<sup>22</sup> has considered promiscuity as essential to definitions of prostitution, since it distinguishes these sexual acts from other types of sexual relationships. Some women may of course, engage in indiscriminate sexual intercourse, but they are not necessarily to be considered as promiscuous by officials or the public. It follows that the identification of prostitutes on the basis of economic reward, emotion and promiscuity has never been straightforward. Scholars have also provided incisive materialist accounts of sex work in Kenya and Southeast Asia respectively.<sup>23</sup>

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16Helen Reynolds. *The economics of prostitution*. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas,1986).

17Xochitl Castañeda et al. .*Sex Masks: The double life of female commercial sex workers in Mexico City*. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* (1996):2: 229-247, 229-230 , see also Sheila Jeffreys, *Marginal Millions. The idea of Prostitution*. (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1997), Kamala Kempadoo. and Jo Doezema. (Eds). *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition*, (New York: Routledge, 1998) .

18Anthony Giddens. *Sociology*, third edition, (London: Polity, 1987)., .78.

19Mark Hunter. *The Materiality of Everyday Sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’*. *African Studies*, (2002):99-120.

20Demirdirek, & Judy Whitehead. *Sexual Encounters*

21Hunter, Mark. *The Materiality of Everyday Sex: thinking beyond ‘prostitution’*. *African Studies*, (2002):99 120.,99.

22Thanh-dam Troung,. *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*. (London: Zed Books, 1990).

23Luise White. *The Comforts of Home Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), Truong . *Sex, Money and Morality*

In framing the “juggling” of transnational smuggling and sex work by Bayang and Ejagham women, our research adopts a “transnational feminist perspective”<sup>24</sup> so as to capture the imbrication of sex work in various global relations of power, thereby demonstrating the fluidity of subjectivities as well as highlighting the individual and collective agency of participants. In line with these scholars, our research maintains that the life worlds of these women is shaped by a collusion between various colonialisms-including structural adjustment programmes-and specific local cultural histories and traditions<sup>25</sup>.

Bayang and Ejagham women’s participation in the sex industry has been a response to economic, social, and even cultural pressures to be financial providers for their families and/or to attend to children’s immediate needs. Despite the oppression of global-local sexual economies, macro-forces, sex workers are capable of individually and collectively challenging “hegemonic, gendered and economic structures of domination and exploitation (through) acts of resistance and individual agency”<sup>26</sup> thereby reconstituting their own subjectivities. Patriarchy as a power field, we argue, is not a ‘culture’ *per se*; rather, it is a contested and permanently shifting field of relational power that always, also opens up spaces for negotiation and autonomy, at least in Africa. Even within patriarchy, women create ‘power spaces’ for their individual and collective agency, calling for a holistic involvement with sex workers “inside, outside and *beyond* representations of a victim identity, and to [...] recognize them as constructing the worlds they live in’ since shifting identities intersect women’s lives, and are linked to particular spaces such as the local neighborhood, the home, the border [...]The complex tapestry of trans-border trade and sex work among Bayang and Ejagham women “must be mapped and (located) within a complex grid of multiple, intersecting and trans-local relationships where it is possible to imagine less determined spaces of subjectivity for (their) voices...” to be heard and to capture the diversity and complexity of their experiences and adaptive strategies<sup>27</sup>.

### **Historical Context: Geography of gendered poverty**

Found in the present-day Manyu Division of Southwest Cameroon, the Bayangs and Ejaghams maintain similar socio-economic and political institutions and have historic connections to the outside world by virtue of their trans-border location on the Cameroon-Nigeria frontiers. Both ethnicities are flanked in the North by the Northwest Region, West by Lebialem Division, North to East by the Cross River State of Nigeria, South by Koupe-Manengouba and Ndian Divisions respectively (Figure 1).

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24Kamala Kempadoo. Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade: Transnational Feminist. Perspectives. Meridians, (2001): 28-51., see also Kamala Kempadoo. “The Migrant Tightrope: Experiences from the Caribbean”. In , Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. P.(Eds) 124-138. Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition, (New York: Routledge, 1998)

25Kempadoo Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade:

26Kamala Kempadoo.Sexing the Caribbean: Gender, Race and Sexual Labour. (London: Routledge, 2004)., .4

27Law.Sex Work in Southeast Asia., .4-5.



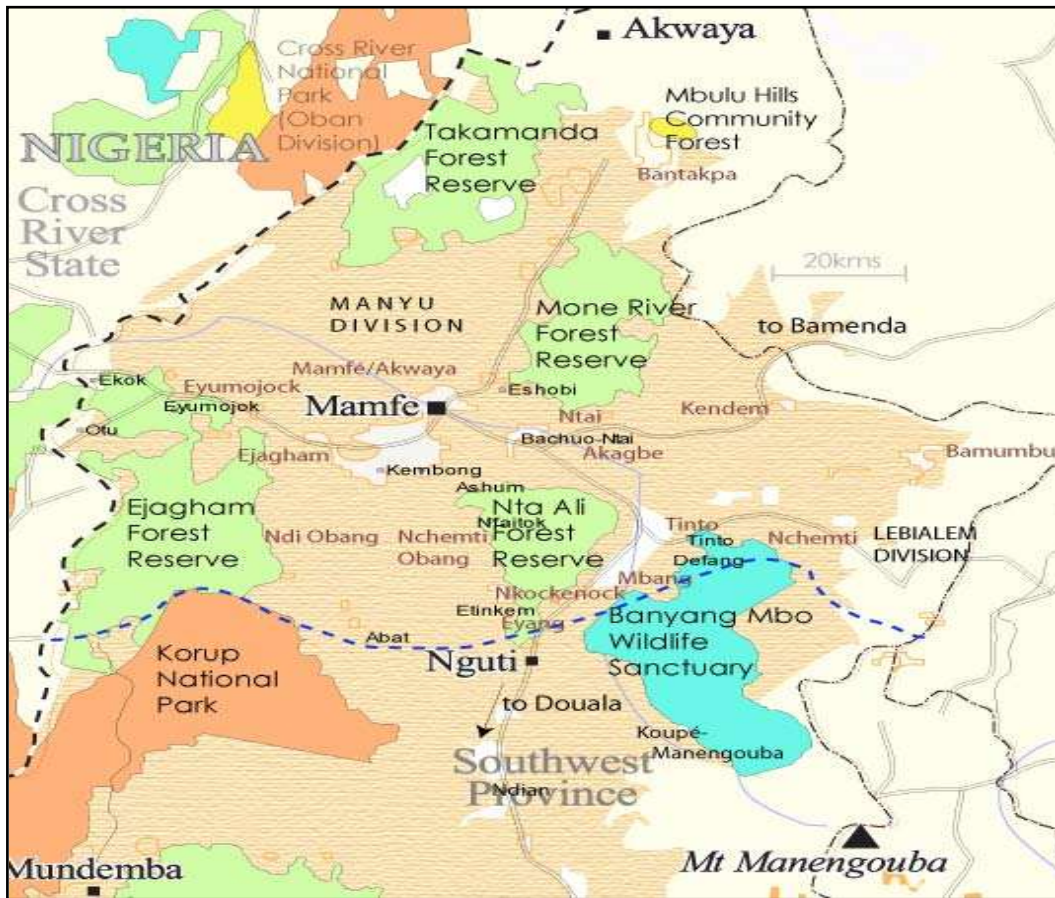


Figure 1: Source: Divisional Office Mamfe

Traditionally, both groups practice slash and burn farming characterized by a gendered division of labor in the production cycle. Men derive most of their cash income from the sale of coffee and cocoa, while women have autonomy only over the sale of excess foodstuff which sells for a pittance. The consequence of this microeconomic pattern, is greater poverty among women than men. Women also become locked into kin-based modes of production: the imposition of power and prestige by men who own and control land and cash means that women remain workers. The cocoa season is characterized by migration into and out of the region by both youths and women and by serial monogamy often called “cocoa season marriages”. Numerous young girls become pregnant while the rate of sexually transmissible diseases (STDs) including AIDS multiply by leaps and bounds due to the people’s strategically historic location and the multiplicity of actors at work. School heads in the region reported that in the 2005/2006 academic year sixteen primary school pupils and eight secondary school students became pregnant resulting in school dismissal. The principal mobile actors are trans-border traders, ‘cocoa merchants’, truckers and drivers, as well as authorities in charge of border control<sup>28</sup>, who are always passing in and out of the region spreading new fashions, ideas and diseases in the process.

Based on their temporal and spatial socio-economic, demographic and occupational locations, these mobile areas and the social actors involved are generally reputed with a high rate of AIDS and other STDs. This presents

<sup>28</sup>National Intelligence Council.2002.The Next Wave of HIV/AIDS: Nigeria, Ethiopia, Russia, India and China. Washington.



even uninfected areas with the greatest threat of the AIDS pandemic<sup>29</sup>. Despite their meager salaries, drivers for example, are a high risk group often taking other goods as direct payment on their way. Truck driving as reported by Orubuloye & Associates<sup>30</sup> attracts adventurous men who are more likely than others to take a risk.

Although the sex trade has transformed gender relations, it has been indicted for fuelling the spread of HIV in these communities as evidenced by commercial sex workers returning home to die. The dominance of the heterosexual paradigm actually conceals other modes of transmission. Beatrice Owasi's analysis of hospital records in this municipality showed that of the 628 persons tested, 1.4 and 2.1 per cent of males and females were infected with HIV. She further reports that 42.4 % of youths and 42.5 % of adults as well as 47.5 % of females do not use condoms. This situation is further compounded by different reactions to the pandemic, the lack of HIV information centers and condom sales points in the community and the fact that insufficient reagents for HIV screening has led to focus on pregnant women at the detriment to the rest of the population<sup>31</sup>. Most people in these communities are apathetic about their HIV/AIDS status and have a fatalistic attitude towards the pandemic: "Death is death, whether caused by accident or HIV. As one is born, one day, he shall die, therefore, there is no need to be afraid" (Enyong, interview of 31/06/06). Others reason HIV to be a 'slow poison' and a misfortune, with condoms as a foreign body meant to deprive people from the pleasure of enjoying sex:

People are being infected every day. They are dying and leaving behind orphans, yet people say it is bad luck and witchcraft. There are some areas where people still believe there is no AIDS. They say that it is the Whiteman's way of fooling people not to enjoy themselves. Because they say they don't enjoy protected sex: "How can I eat sweets in a wrapper [polythene]?", they ask. That is what they feel. That is the problem. They don't believe that there is AIDS. And then mothers too, when their daughters come home from town sick [meaning infected with HIV], they say it is slow poison. That people have poisoned their daughters. They find it difficult to accept that it is AIDS, even when tests have been conducted... So, there is a culture of silence and denial. But I think that there is hardly a family here in the Division, that you could say, which has not been touched [by the scourge of HIV/AIDS]. If I say Division I just want to be cautious but if not, I could say in the whole Province, which is not touched (Madam Nyenty Henriette, Divisional Delegate For Women's Empowerment, Mamfe, Interview of 18/05/06).

They look at condoms as a foreign thing [body] that has been brought into society to reduce their sexual taste, the pleasure of sex. They prefer going them live, flesh to flesh. Very few use condoms. Some women even become pregnant before they know that they have taken in because, some are embarrassed. You see a woman giving birth to 5-8 children, not because she likes it, she fails to know that she can protect herself and they hardly come out to ask for medical advice... When they become pregnant, they only struggle to abort and when they do not succeed, they decide grudgingly to give birth. But to prevent or go for family planning with their husbands, most do not. The lack of medical facilities and illiteracy are the main factors behind this. If a woman gives birth and stays for long, say, eight years, without giving birth again, it is looked upon as being abnormal as being the handiwork of witchcraft. She is normally supposed to be giving birth, year in and year out, without resting (Ofuka Jacob, interview of 18/07/2006, Otu village).

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29Orubuloye, I.O, et al.. 'The role of high risk occupations in the spread of AIDS: truck drivers and itinerant market women in Nigeria'. In *Sexual Networking and AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa: Behavioural Research and the Social Context*. Edited. I.O Orubuloye, John. C Caldwell, Pat .Caldwell and G. Santow.: 89-101. (The Australian National University, 1994),.87.

30Orubuloye et al. 'The role of high risk occupations in the spread of AIDS

31Beatrice Owasi.2009. Report of Eyumojock HIV Risk Map Submitted to GTZ PROPSFE Support Programme to the implementation of the Forest Environment Sector Programme. Last accessed, September 30, 2011<http://cameroun-foret.com/bibliotheque/10457>

Additionally, practices such as “dry sex” which most males in the region enjoy leads to trauma that can facilitate HIV transmission. Other transmission modes, also intimately intertwined with culture include high fertility preferences; low levels of voluntary counseling and testing (leading to mother-to-child transmission); widow inheritance. These factors coupled with inadequate levels of prenatal care, and poor dietary services that make blood transfusion to pregnant women risky due to the inexistence of screening services, paint a problematic picture of the reality faced by the women of these communities. Lastly, the social customs of piercing social marks and female circumcision with unsterilized, skin-piercing instruments also expose many people to the risk of infection.

The gender dimensions relevant to HIV/AIDS in these communities penetrate a wide range of social aspects entangling the economic, legal, cultural, religious, political and sexual status of women. Riding on the back of existing inequalities, HIV/AIDS aggravates the situation of women, translating existing differences into harsher conditions on the ground and into higher HIV prevalence. The dynamics of gender and HIV intersect by creating multiple mechanisms that exacerbate the vulnerability of women both to contracting the virus, coping with the disease and caring for others infected and affected by the pandemic. The women’s care burden has increased: saddled with caring for orphans and the elderly often leads to a breakdown of traditional support mechanisms. Orphanhood exacerbates gender inequalities: girl orphans are overworked and more likely to drop out of school. To this we must add the increase of food insecurity owing to shortages of agriculture labor. Life expectancy thus falls with household savings.

The Bayang and Ejagham ethnic groups were middlemen during the transatlantic slave trade linking the Cross River State and the Western Grassfield region of Cameroon. Today, they are the link between the West and Central African regions. The colonial plantations which attracted other people into this region are located in the fertile coastal plains of Southwest Cameroon. These developments led to the accelerated monetization of the economy, the creation of new tastes, values and status symbols which the indigenous economy could no longer sustain. Faced with abject poverty and slim opportunities towards self-improvement, women gravitate towards economic opportunities including trans-border trade and transactional sex work as an escape from the collusion between patriarchy and capitalism.

#### IV. “Colonial Patriarchy”, Sex work and Women’s agency

By colonial patriarchy, our research underscores the collaboration between colonial capitalism and patriarchy as separate, but interrelated fields of power that connived and locked women into kin-ordered modes of production making sex work a survival strategy and “viable means”. The implantation of plantation agriculture in the Southwest region led to the monetization of the traditional economy and transformation in social relations. We argue that capitalist accumulation worked alongside, was complementary, but at the same time, transformed and reconfigured gender relations in the process. Elders, however, attribute the trans-nationalization of sex work in the 1980s and 1990s only to “the coming of the Whiteman” (inequalities orchestrated by colonialism, postcolonialism and globalization):

There was no premarital intercourse in those days (meaning for females) but today women are like gravel, they could be kicked and thrown anywhere. They start by dating and may not eventually get married although they might get pregnant. When you came across a girl in those days, she will escape, feeling that intercourse is painful. They used to run away from men. Maturity was determined through at least five menstrual cycles. Even my wife was running away from me for more than two years. I brought gifts, she will not take but the mother

was taking. The elder sister informed me she is getting mature and might be tempted to sleep with somebody outside. In the 1980s like today, some of them said they were/ are doing international business across the border, whereas, they go there and sleep with men and bring HIV/AIDS into the community. Times have changed and women are taking too much liberty. We do not know where this world is going to... (Pa Otang Interview of 10/03/06, Eyumojock).

Since the Whiteman came, women are claiming many freedoms-they went to Nigeria and stayed there for weeks in the name of trading so as to get money and fight the economic hard times with it, meanwhile in reality, they were actually going to see their boyfriends. Even married women were doing the same. Mr. Dina, almost killed his wife in late 1980 when somebody came and told him she was sleeping with another man, the man she used to go and stay there while trading in Nigeria. In our days, things were not like this.(Ma Sophina, 58-years-old, Ekok, 23/03/2006).

In the above-cited interview abstracts, the interlocutors highlight the interaction of the local situation with global capitalism and attribute social change to the intrusion of capitalism. There are, as Maria Meiss notes, connections between the prevailing sexual division of labor and the international division of labor in the global economy<sup>32</sup>.

Colonialism transformed conjugal and intergenerational relationships through the monetization of the economy. The establishment of plantation agriculture in the fertile coastal areas of Cameroon by the German colonial administration led to forced labor conscription and to an unprecedented upsurge of largely single males from the hinterlands of the Western Grassfields region and Nigeria. This unprecedented wave of rural-urban labor migration orchestrated movement out of the patriarchal orbit and separation between spouses and family members. It also gave rise to changes and dislocations in local social structures, and simultaneously afforded an escape from tradition and patriarchy as a power field. European plantation landlords in turn established company towns ('native reserves'), to accommodate their workers. This simultaneously served the interests of capital by forcing women and children to subsidize male wages through agricultural production and the interests of older African men by facilitating their control. Largely populated by single men, there was an acute shortage of women leading to large scale sex work: '*the few available women sold like hot cakes. Even some married women left their husbands in favor of their boyfriends who were far richer*' (Pa Otang, Interview of 10/03/2006, Eyumojock). As reported by Elizabeth Schmidt, labor migration for South Africa afforded to senior men left behind some access to those wages; cash income that would otherwise be unavailable to them<sup>33</sup>.

The outward migration of Bayang and Ejagham women to perform sex work all over Cameroon and beyond, which accentuated in the 1980s and 1990s, was not a historical precedent. ABEMO for instance, notes that sex work "has been a long time female activity in this region."<sup>34</sup> In what follows, the reconstructive memories of elders and some of the participants situate the agency of these women who engaged in both commercial sex work and trade

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32Maria Meiss. Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World scale: Women in the International Division of Labour. (London: Zed Books, 1998), .x

33 Elizabeth Schmidt. "Negotiated Spaces and Contested Terrain:Men, Women, and the Law in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1890-1939. Journal of Southern African Studies, 16, no.4(1990)

34ABEMO. 2002. Report on Legal Awareness Programme in Ejagham Community. Buea, Cameroon: ABEMO.

across the Cameroon-Nigeria frontiers. One of the interlocutors, Mami Sophina, fifty-eight-years-old, nostalgically recalled that:

Before the Whiteman came, our women were obedient and decent, but today, they are dressing in miniskirts, half naked, with their bodies exposed, in the name of freedom. They are sleeping with many men at the same time, instead of getting married. Go to the border towns and see what these women who claim they are doing business do at night. (Interview, 23/03/2006, Eyumojock).

Our research, however, argues that patriarchal control over land, kin and cash has apparently made sex work for some women an attractive venture. The ‘freezing of cash’ is an outcome of the articulation of modes of production and of women’s dependence on men. Eric Wolf aptly maintains that seeing societies as interconnected systems linked within wider “social fields” and modes of production permits us to capture inter-systemic and intra-systemic relationships<sup>35</sup>. Indeed, the capitalist and kin-based mode of production link and create contestation. Patriarchy implies monopoly over land and labor based on traditional relationships – it mobilizes the kin group and expropriates the labor of wives and daughters. As a social field of power, patriarchy is at the juncture of two modes of production because capitalism never destroyed but rather worked through the kinship mode of production, simultaneously stretching its field of operation into and over its mode of production. Consequently, some women asserted their agency by moving out of the patriarchal orbit for alternative ways of life such as sex work.

Caught up between the capitalist and kinship modes of production, patriarchy works through but at the same time, becomes contentious within the same framework. Patriarchal attempts to stem Bayang and Ejagham women’s march towards economic empowerment and accumulation through gendered divisions of labor in both production and exchange, instead backfired. Though this juggling of trans-border trade and sex work on the Cameroon-Nigeria frontier in the 1980s and 1990s—a period of deep social and economic crisis in the West African region—led to far greater economic freedom such as the ability to own land and cash, it did not lead to liberation per se as most continue to remain trapped in poverty.

## V. Crisis, chaos and dislocation: the 1980s-1990s

The unfettered post-effects of prosperity following the Nigerian oil boom of the 1970s, alongside the economic downturn that began affecting Cameroon in the late 1980s, generated a patriarchal moral panic as men lost control over their wives and daughters who had become trans-border economic agents trading in both goods and in the illicit sale of sex across the Cameroon-Nigeria border. When prices petered out in the world market, the government of Nigeria imposed austerity measures for basic necessities was in short supply. Cross-border black marketeering for both sexes became rampant. Some women combined this trans-border trade with sex trade work. Certain women came to earn the title of “Ikom Line Women” because they were trading between Ikom in Nigeria and Mamfe in Cameroon. In Mamfe, they owned a group of shops where they sold various products from Nigeria. These entrepreneurs are mostly unmarried women and even today over 75% are single, divorced or widowed. Niger-Thomas observed that:

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<sup>35</sup>Eric Wolf. *Europe and the People without History*. (California: University of California Press, 1982), 76.

they carved out an unorthodox economic survival strategy for themselves and their families...In the 1980s, women's smuggling activities reached its apogee in the area. At this time, mostly prostitutes were involved in this trade, including a group of women called "Kaduna Come Down"<sup>36</sup>

In 1994, the economic meltdown aggravated and the government of Cameroon adopted a structural adjustment plan. Alongside fourteen other African countries within the franc zone, Cameroon devalued her currency and slammed a 65% salary cut on civil servants. Cameroonians began mapping out new biographic trajectories, for collective crisis tends to engender these shifts<sup>37</sup>, with reactions ranging from conformism on the part of some to imaginative innovation on the part of others.<sup>38</sup> Informal economic activities such as cross-border trade by both men and women increased substantially as an alternative avenue for accumulation. One of several constraints is the open solicitation of cash bribes and female body commodification by those in positions of state control and authority along the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Niger-Thomas notes, among others that:

[...]bribery [...] can also take the form of sexual harassment. Certainly, female entrepreneurs have been known to flirt with officers on duty with the aim of establishing familiarity in order to evade cash payments. On the other hand, officers have been known to demand sex from female entrepreneurs".

And elsewhere:

Well, nothing goes for nothing on the border: it is give and take. At times, one has to maintain a good relationship with an Officer just to have a safe pass each time you come there and when he is transferred, you can rely on his friends or get another one, instead of paying bribe money to cross. You might even have two or three, it depends on how you play your cards. That is what I normally do to survive (Miriam, Eyumojock, 24/06/06).

I stopped trading in jewelries because each time I crossed the border, the Officers harassed him for sex, meanwhile I already had a boyfriend (Agbor, 23/05/06, Ekok).

Unlike Miriam who is able to use her sexuality as an adaptive strategy to evade cash payments and maximize profits, Agbor gave up trans-border trade altogether because of constant sexual harassment from officers in charge of border control. We observed that most of the illegal money collected as bribes by border guards nourishes the maintenance of multiple concubines and the lavish evening entertainment of Ekok, the last border town between Cameroon and Nigeria.

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<sup>36</sup>Niger-Thomas. "Women and the Arts of Smuggling." 60.

<sup>37</sup>Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 110.

<sup>38</sup>Nantang Jua. *Differential Responses to Disappearing Transitional Pathways: Redefining Possibility among Cameroonian Youths*. *African Studies Review*, (2003), 14.



### The “Kaduna Come Down Women”

A heterogeneous, but interrelated group of female Bayang and Ejagham trans-border traders, these women came from similar disadvantaged backgrounds – a fact that played a role in their move into cross-border trade and commercial sex. They however have divergent experiences, in their utilization of opportunities and in the level of success they achieved depending on how they maximized the opportunities at their disposal. While some engaged in conspicuous consumption, others invested their earnings in other profitable ventures such as buying land and building houses for themselves, sponsoring their children or other family members. To achieve these different aims, they developed different lifestyles and a variety of ways of dealing with sexual relationships.

The “Kaduna Come Down Women” is a collective metaphor designating the group of Bayang and Ejagham trans-border entrepreneurs and sex traders who had migrated to Nigeria and were among aliens forced to leave the country in 1984. In Nigeria during the 1980s, most free women from the Mamfe region in Cameroon settled mostly in Kaduna, in the Muslim North. They equally settled in the then capital Lagos and in other strategic commercial towns like Calabar, in the Cross River State of Nigeria among groups with which they share a common culture and socio-cultural institutions. In the wake of the structural adjustment program imposed on most African countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Nigerian aliens were evicted from Ghana. The Nigerian government retaliated by adopting a “Nigeria for Nigerians policy”. This meant the nationalization of the economy in favor of nationals. Among aliens forced to leave Nigeria were Bayang and Ejagham “professional prostitutes” who had been living in Northern Nigeria and elsewhere. These returned migrant-entrepreneur-prostitutes from the North earned the group label of “Kaduna Come Down”.

Niger-Thomas suggests a historical connection between smuggling and sex work. Some officers along the Cameroon-Nigeria border still believe that most women engaged in inter-country business are prostitutes<sup>39</sup>. This explains why they often harass them: “*to get their own share of the national cake*” where any financially viable individual should have access to a woman because like state finance, her genital is everlasting. Other metaphors compare women to “bush meat”, “elephant meat”- invoking the abundance of the forest. Faced with persistent sexual harassment, some such as Agbor abandoned her trans-border jewelry business.

Although they defy easy categorization, three groups are distinguishable with varied degrees of control over their working conditions, despite various dangers,-including infection with STDs and AIDS: (1) free-lancers who were almost entirely dependent on selling sex, (2) waitresses in bars who engaged in a more institutionalized type of commercial sex work, at times, often mediated by their mistresses and, (3) the more successful entrepreneurs who earned money from their own bars (traded in other goods as well as from commercial sex work) accumulated and made other long term investments. The interview excerpts that follow are illustrative:

I was initially doing just trans-border trade in okrika (second hand clothes), but when my goods were stolen, I had no other choice than to start befriending men with the hope that I will gather enough capital and re-start my business. I did not succeed until the government sent us away and I returned to Mamfe with my modest savings and bought a plot, on which I have constructed this house (Besong, interview of 02/04/2006).

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39Margaret Niger-Thomas. "Women and the Arts of Smuggling." *African Studies Review*. (2001):44 (2): 43-68.

When I arrived Kaduna, I was employed by a Madam from our village as a waitress, but she was not paying well and always wanting to control my life as if I was a girl. To survive, I got entangled with some men by myself, unlike the other workers whom she usually collected their monies and kept for them if a man wanted to have some nice time with any of them (Manyong, interview of 20/05/06).

After a year in the trans-border business, I decided to settle down in Kaduna. I opened my own bar and recruited three waitresses, and set up a shop in Mamfe stocked with cutlery. My junior brother was controlling it, but squandered everything with women. When the government of Nigeria kicked us out, I still had good money, because my boyfriends used to be very generous to me. One paid my rents while the other provided money for food. I also made savings in our weekly njangi (thrift and loan society) (MamiTabe, interview of 03/05/06).

Some of these entrepreneur-sex-workers, “professional prostitutes” in regional common-parlance have today instituted an occupational shift after accumulating the necessary capital with which to set up a business (such as a bar, restaurant, a provision store). Nevertheless, despite the accumulation of capital value they still sell romance along with other services that they deliver. Commercial sex work, Kamala Kempadoo observed, is not always a “steady activity”, but might take place in conjunction with other income-generating activities. Rather, it can be an activity that women (and men) take for short periods “as part of an annual cycle of work”<sup>40</sup>. Similarly, Brennan has underscored the difficulties of sex workers getting out of poverty because of a “sexual labor continuum onto which times can be mapped in poor women’s lives when they might work in the formal sex trade, as well as other times, when former sex workers might build transactional sexual relationships outside the former sex trade.”<sup>41</sup>. Common knowledge has it that as a cost saving and profit maximization strategy, most trans-border entrepreneurs often have sex partners on the trade route so as to avoid paying hotel bills. Another common strategy used by female trans-border traders is to befriend one of the agents of border control. Atem, a spinster of thirty-three and trans-border trader noted:

They say that I am a vagabond because I am always on business across the border. Business is my own massa [husband]. I make profit and my true massa [partner] at Ikom is very good, unlike this poor, ungenerous gendarme man. However, I always use his connections on the border to cross without paying anything. The one in Mamfe comes here only from time to time to pay my rents and give money for food (Atem, interview of 12/04/2006, Ekok).

The stigma associated with ‘trans-border trade’ threatens other people’s expectations of “the way things ought to be”, but Atem has carved out a dual subsistence strategy by combining trading in goods and transactional sex, showing both her economic and sexual agency. There is thus the co-existence of sex linked to subsistence and sex linked to consumption, although excess is normally (re)-invested or opportunities accruing from these relationships are exploited for profit. Atem’s boyfriend across the border at Ikom provides accommodation and gifts whenever

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40Kamala Kempadoo. “The Migrant Tightrope: Experiences from the Caribbean”. In , Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema. P.(Eds) 124-138. *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), 3-4.

41,Denise Brennan. *Love work in Sex Work (and After) Performing Love*. In *Intimacies. Love + Sex Across Cultures* .edited. William. R. Jankowiak, 172-193. (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2008)., .175.

she is on trans-border trade, thereby permitting her to make much profit. In Mamfe, it is often said casually that “*women choose men: one for rent, one for food, one for clothes*”. But women also remit money to their relatives for various needs, including contribution towards the upkeep of their children. From observation, some of these materially driven relationships become long-term and some couples eventually marry/co-habit and bring up children together. This chimes with findings from the Caribbean<sup>42</sup> and Bangkok.<sup>43</sup>

The very idea of being in a sexual relationship, (having a ‘massa’)- is suggestive of women’s agency. Mami Bessong, in her fifties, trades in second-hand clothes between Cameroon and Nigeria. She spends the nights with her fiancée- a wealthy Alhaji and polygynist - who also buys goods from her for his family members.

I started this business when I left my husband because he did not take my trans-border business well. At that time, I was thirty years old and men were just mad about me. When I went to Nigeria, I stayed with my village relatives until when I got a boyfriend. But each time, I came to the border crossing, the officers were always refusing my bribe, so I befriended one of them and since then, things have been easy. When he is not there, the friends normally allow me to pass without paying anything. The small money my Alhaji man where I now stay most of the time gives me, apart from buying my goods for his family is pocket money. I can at least make some profit because I spend very little, unlike those who go to hotels. A man respects you when you have something that you are doing.

This is a further instance in which transactional sex is combined and used as a marketing strategy, all with the aim of cost-cutting and simultaneously, making more money. While participants often pointed out that sex work was basically for subsistence, there is a significant amount of ellipsis here and their accounts must be read with caution. These ellipses constitute words or things they could not ordinarily talk about due to the stigma attached to prostitution. As Richard Price notes, ‘strategies of ellipsis, concealment and partial disclosure [are] techniques of revelation and secrecy that govern (...) communication’<sup>44</sup>. In the interview excerpts quoted above various social actors downplay the importance of the money they made from sex work: “small money”, “for rents and food”. The reason for this is that they do not want to look desperate and whilst wanting to have a high bargaining power with the men: “*A man respects you when you have something that you are doing*”.

At the same time however, some own bars, shops, have acquired land and built houses, have sponsored their children and relatives for university, set up some in business or enabled them to learn a trade. Certain of these investments have been undertaken by clients in the name of love. One woman, Ntui, 43-years-old, pointed out that her boyfriend, whom she met in Nigeria whilst working as a trans-border trader, eventually built a house, set up a bar for her, and sponsored her younger brother and son for study at the University of Calabar. On her part, Besong, a former trans-border trader pointed out that she used the opportunity to befriend a top administrator in Yaounde who out of jealousy, decided to send her to a teachers training college rather than allow her “to be seeing other men in the name of business”. Most of these women, interlocutors maintained, also adopted unorthodox strategies to extort money from their permanent boyfriends such as through crookery and the use of black magic to mesmerize the men. For instance, some reportedly complained of feeling sick, of their mothers lying in hospital, of the death of a fictitious family member, thereby requesting monies which they then diverted for their projects or placed in thrift

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42Kampadoo Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade:

43Marc Askew. Bangkok: Place, practice and representation. Asia’s Global Cities. (London: Routledge, 2002).

44Richard Price First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People.(Chicago:University of Chicago Press,1983),.6.

and loan societies for profit. By local standards, these women are heroines, and are respected in their communities for achieving what even most working class men are unable to.

It is clear that the notion and concept of ‘sex work’ does not do justice to the complexity and intricacy of these women’s lives. Unfortunately, there is often no hyphenated identity for such women. As demonstrated by the Central and Eastern European region, sex work actually has many grey zones<sup>45</sup>. Hunter notes that both transactional sex and prostitution involve multiple partner sexual networking, underscored by the exchange of gifts or cash. But transactional sex, Hunter maintains, differs significantly from prostitution: participants construct each other as (“deuxième bureau”), “mistress”, “boyfriend” and “girlfriend” and not “prostitute” and “client” where “the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a wider set of obligations that might not involve a predetermined payment”<sup>46</sup>. Respondents in Kempadoo’s research undertaken in the Caribbean made little confusion between commercial transactions in which condoms were used and a steady, loving relationship in which such measure were dispensed with. Thus the complexity, and simultaneous materiality and meaningfulness of sex and all other embodied practices<sup>47</sup>.

The historical emergence of the “Kaduna Come down” women represents an important component of sexual labor in the Mamfe region. Most returned women settled in towns like Mamfe, Douala and Kumba where they established businesses, usually bars. The slums of Mamfe town like the shanty towns of other Cameroonian cities reveal a vivid picture of an ethnic red light district dominated by women from this part of Cameroon. In towns such as Kumba and Douala, massively settled quarters by these women have been designated as “Bayangi quarters”. In Kumba, their quarter is equally called the “The Fence”- connoting an enclosed space used for certain kinds of illicit activities. These sites resonate with Phil Hubbard’s mapping and articulation of commercial sex work through social discourses, representations and practices onto particular sites, as “sites of both desire and disgust”<sup>48</sup>. In local Cameroonian parlance, the ethnic label “Bayangi” usually connotes a sex worker. In fact, women from this area have not only migrated to various Cameroonian towns, but are equally found in other African countries including Gabon and Equatorial Guinea.

Having lived a ‘free’ urban life in Nigeria, it seems that they no longer saw their place in rural society, either because of the stigma of sex work or because they wanted to continue with the same lifestyle in the urban environment out of the immediate purview of patriarchy. Some of these returned “business women” still sold romance and love alongside other services that they delivered. This is part of the double bind as they legitimized their activities as a way to earn a living, but create a myth of what they do<sup>49</sup>. Others have parlayed their wealth from sex trade into marriage with ex-boyfriends for respect. Egemene, for instance stated that: “*When I returned and settled in Douala, I invited my ex-boyfriend to come and stay with me. Now, we have two children and we are struggling together. I opened for him a tailoring workshop and with the shop at Marché Congo, we are able to make ends meet.*” As observed by Yos Santasombat, in relationships between Thai sex workers and “farang men” (white-skinned westerners), the line between love and money can become “very fuzzy”<sup>50</sup>.

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45Demirdirek, & Judy Whitehead. Sexual Encounters, see also Don Kalb, On the Cheap. Focaal. (2004): 43(1) v-vi.

46 Hunter. The Materiality of Everyday Sex, 100.

47Kempadoo. Women of Color and the Global Sex Trade:

48Phil Hubbard. Red-light districts and toleration zones: geographies of female street prostitution in England and Wales, Area, (1997): 29:128-140, 198.

49Castañeda Xochitl et al. Sex Masks ,p. 234 , see also Yos Santasombat. Women selling Themselves: Community and the sale of Commercial sex in Thai Society. (Bangkok: Community Development Press, 1992), 15-17.

The Mamfe region has become the main supplier of commercial sex workers for most brothels in Cameroon. Some are usually drawn into sex work through female social networks of friends/or families. Enlisted by a sex trade veteran to work in “sécuire”(brothels) and bars as ‘maids’, ‘servants’, or as short-term-holiday-marker-prostitutes these workers make money for their school needs. However, some end up eventually dropping out of school and taking up sex work full time. Although at everyone’s disposal, some men still keep them as permanent, paid concubines, “titulaire”, unfettered sexual access is maintained, and there is an expectation to technically remain faithful. But these ladies also secretly render occasional quick client sessions (“coup pressé”) in which temporal boundaries are strictly maintained. Marc Asken notes about the Thai sex industry that “when commercialized sexual encounters between customers and bar women become personalized, and ongoing, the understanding of exchange itself becomes more generalized, and not tied to payment for specific sex acts”<sup>51</sup>. Such a relationship could also shift from sex work to marriage with former boyfriends, as reported for the case of the Dominican Republic<sup>52</sup>. This suggests the co-existence of several types of sexual encounters and the permeability of self-identity. There is the *relational, professional* or *recreational* vector to this identity twinned with the need to maintain the proper distance from the emotional demands of the client encounter<sup>53</sup>.

Control is maintained over the sex act and the boundaries between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ space adhered to. O’Connell Davidson’s<sup>54</sup> concept of the ‘liminal’ status of the prostitute is remembered here, that is, of selling a service that has not been totally commodified, which is usually associated with the non-commercial private sphere, regulated by values of intimacy, love and affect. One might even suggest that the site of prostitution (geographical, bodily and symbolic space) is crucial for the prostitute’s self esteem, agency and indeed for the psychological constructs of self identity.

### **Towards a regional historical explanation**

Sex work in the Manyu region has been an almost time-honored source of accumulation. But the medium of exchange changed with the monetization of the rural economy – a situation that created new tastes and values. Despite a conjunction between indigenous factors and extra-local factors –particularly the effects of capitalist developments – Manyu women’s adaptive strategies must be understood in terms of a mutual dependence of social structures and human agency<sup>55</sup>. The fading and intermittent memories of elders explain Bayang and Ejagham women’s propensity to seek independent lives as a subversion of the colonial ideology of domesticity disseminated at the mission schools where they were among the pioneers to receive formal Western education. Most elders conceded that “Our women were among the first to see the Whiteman”. This statement corroborates Melinda Adam’s account that Southern Cameroonian women were not passive recipients of colonial and missionary doctrines based on “housewifization.”<sup>56</sup>

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51 Marc Asken, . Bangkok: Place, practice and representation. *Asia’s Global Cities*, p.179, Routledge, London 2002

52 Brennan, Love work in Sex, 185

53 Joanna Brewis. and Stephen Linstead. “The Worst thing is the Screwing”(1): Consumption and the management of identity in sex work. *Gender, Work and Organisation*. (2000): 2:85-97, .85.

54 Julia O’Connell Davidson. ‘ The Sources and limits of resistance in a privatized utility’, in J Jermier, John. M, Knights, David and Nord, Walter, R. (eds) *Resistance and Power in Organizations*, 69-101. (London: Routledge, 1994).

55 Pierre Bourdieu. *Outline of A Theory of Practice*. Trans. Richard Nice. (Cambridge. Cambridge University Press, 1977).

56 Adams, Melinda. “Colonial policies and Women’s participation in public Life: The case of British Southern Cameroons”. *African Studies Monograph*. (2006):3:1-22.



As an adaptive strategy for Bayang and Ejagham women's emancipation, sex work is a form of protest against rural poverty, patriarchal exploitation and domination. However, it must be pointed out that it was not protest against male dominance and exploitation *per se* that led to sex work, but rather, the deliberate desire to make money caused by both internal and external forces, that is, by shifts and contractions in the global and regional political economy (or rather the shifts in the geo-socio-economic picture) . This is compounded by the people's location within a "culture contact zone"<sup>57</sup>: the transatlantic slave trade; colonialism and its linkage to the metropolitan economy via plantation agriculture. Women's double vulnerability has been explained in terms of economic shocks and, "to their gender conditions [...] their more limited access to material [...] satisfactions"<sup>58</sup>. Globally, women's choices are limited by their generally disadvantaged position within hierarchical structures of sex, race, and class. Such iniquities, coupled with "extreme differences of wealth within and among nations, creates tremendous pressures on women to engage in any available form of employment, including sex work"<sup>59</sup>. A link between structural economic downturns and motivation to sell sex has thus been established in Africa.<sup>60</sup>

The income from sex work makes some women visibly rich and influential ("itinerant gold mines")<sup>61</sup> and sex work has become one of the most important sources of accumulation for both communities and households in the area. Although there are no hard statistics on remittances entering the region through various money transfer outfits, some of the sex workers have been able to construct houses and to give their children and relatives university level education or send them abroad for "greener pastures". The implication is that families benefit from sex work while the state does not since the practice is informal and untracked in Cameroon. Although poverty alone is not the only root cause of sex work, Kempadoo maintains that "within the international gendered division of labour and the demands of the globalization of capitalism, it presents one of the few income-generating alternatives for Asian, African, Caribbean and Latin American women"<sup>62</sup>. Countering feminists who see sex work as violence to women, Merchand points out that under global restructuring, postmodern and postcolonial conditions, "social relations, subjects and subjectivities are undergoing profound changes and that "concepts and categories of prostitution and prostitute are not static", but also, are subject to change."<sup>63</sup>

This said, the cultural pattern of co-habitation seems to be a contributory factor for the exponential growth of the sex trade in the Southwest region. Naaneen noted 'generous sexual attitudes' in the area and further stated that like in the Ikom Division "as long as anyone can remember, marriage ties with free women have been rather fragile"<sup>64</sup>. Similarly, Richard Harris reported that many marriages with free women allowed them to have lovers, suggesting that these women exercised some sexual agency<sup>65</sup>. This chimes with Lauren Derby's finding that Sosuan sex workers do not conceive of marriage as either restricting their sexual life or as permanent because of the

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57Patricia Bizzel.. 'Contact Zones and English Studies'. Cross-Talk in Composition Theory.(Urbana, Illinois, NCFE, 1997).

58CastañedaXochitl et al. Sex Masks

59Chapkis Live sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor.,52

60Sander L. Gilman, Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1985)

61Benedict Naanen. B. "Economy and Society in eastern Nigeria, 1900- 1966: A Study of the Problems of Development and Social Change". Phd Dissertation, Dalhousie University,1988

62Kempadoo , 2001, 34

63Merchand, "Migration, (Im)mobility and Modernity., 959, 963

64Benedict Naaneen "Itinerant Gold Mines": Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930- 1950'. African Studies Review, (1991): 34 (2): 57- 79, 65.

65Richard Harris. 'The History of Trade at Ikom'. (Africa (1972): 43, 13.

complex and contradictory structure of the Dominican family, “characterized by concubinage, serial unions, female headed households” and *de facto* polygamy<sup>66</sup>.

## VI. Conclusion

This paper adopted a “transnational feminist framework” to examine the effects of, and conjunction between, capitalism and kin-ordered modes of patriarchal power on Bayang and Ejagham women’s entry and exit from cross-border smuggling and commercial sex work in the 1980s and 1990s. Their “juggling” of sex work and trade as a source of personal accumulation is a time-specific response with reminiscences to the 1950s when official negation of the ways in which economic projects of capitalism and economic restructuring such as migrant labor schemes, transformed and created a demand for new forms of sexual and domestic services. African women were identified as the source of moral “decay”<sup>67</sup> and while the transnationalization of commercial sex and trans-border trade was time and place specific, we have argued that though not socially sanctioned and therefore a serious challenge to the patriarchal social order, sex work, as a survival strategy, has historical precedents in the region: socio-cultural practices such as ‘free unions’ tolerated sex work while married women had lovers. These practices have been reinforced for economic reasons and in the process, these women skillfully and creatively drew upon the past in order to negotiate the present, in order to shape their history in everyday, contemporary situations, transforming their social relations with patriarchy in terms of historical processes, “as actors in the global arena, as persons capable of making choices and decisions that lead to transformations of consciousness and changes in everyday life.”<sup>68</sup> These actors, however, continue to search for liberty. In analyzing the complexity of women’s life worlds, and their multiple, time and place specific identities, we must take cognizance of specific local histories, the entanglement between dynamic local and extra-local geo-socio-economic and indeed geo-political circumstances, and how these women adopt new, transformative strategies to assert both their individual and collective being where patriarchy as a power field does not preclude resistance and agency. The overall impact of the sex trade has been uneven because most women were engaged in subsistence sex while those with foresight and acquisitiveness accumulated capital from it and successfully negotiated a career shift. Most, however, remain trapped in poverty and liberation, the historical light-at-the-end-of-the-tunnel, remains dim. Simultaneously, the violence and exposure to HIV infection with its attendant social and economic problems has led to a breakdown in social support mechanisms as both the elderly and orphans have to be cared for by women. It has also taxed household health budgets leading to greater poverty.

There is the need for the empowerment of these women by giving them access to loans and by putting in place micro-financial schemes that can provide loans to them at affordable and low interest rates. It is expected that such incentives will lead to the improvement of women’s status and provide them with the financial means to effectively take care of their children and close relatives. It should be recalled that Bayang and Ejagham women’s entry into trans-border trade and commercial sex work was a response to economic, social, and even cultural pressures to be

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66Lauren Derby..H.“The Dictator’s Seduction: Gender and State Spectacle during the Trujillo Regime.” In *Latin American Popular Culture. An Introduction*, Edited William. H. Beezley and Linda. A. Curcio-Nagy, (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 2000),. 217.

67Sherley McCurdy. A. “Urban Threats: Manyema Women, Low Fertility, and Venereal Diseases in Tanganyika” In “Wicked Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa. Edited Dorothy Hodson. L, Shirley McCurdy. A.. 212-233. (Portsmouth N. H. Heinemann, 2001), 13

68Kempadoo “The Migrant Tigh trope: Experiences from the Caribbean”, 8-9

financial providers for their families and/or to attend to children's immediate needs. Additionally, the government could also regulate the sex trade by giving participants some leverage through regulation so as to avoid their exploitation and exposure to sexually transmissible diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

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