

African Women Do Not Look Good in Wigs: Gender, Beauty Rituals and Cultural Identity in Anglophone Cameroon, 1961–1972

Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué

“Nebuchadnezzar lived in the bush and his nails became so long that they looked like claws of cats, following a punishment from God for his disobedience,” runs a May 1964 letter to ‘Women’s Special,’ a dedicated women’s advice column for the English-language newspaper, the *Cameroon Times* (Isuk, 1964:4). The letter writer, Augustine Isuk, denounces women’s beauty habits by drawing on the biblical story of God’s punishment of King Nebuchadnezzar for worshipping false gods. He connects long nails to poor housekeeping, arguing that “women with long nails keep painting them thus hiding the dirt underneath and in preparing food, the dirt is washed into the food, and no wonder they complain of belly aches.” Isuk further associates long, painted nails with British women, and insists that men in Cameroon prefer “natural beauty.” He writes: “The nature of man is the work of God and no excessive decorations will change you from what you are...You can sandpaper the face, powder your nose, paint the lips, and look wonderful under electric lights, yet you can’t beat natural beauty which is always there... Women, cut short your nails please!” (Isuk, 1964:4).

The *Cameroon Times* was the oldest English-language newspaper in the federated state of West Cameroon, and circulated in most urban towns, including Limbe, Kumba, Bamenda and West Cameroon’s capital, Buea (Doh, 2014). ‘Women’s Special’ was a column addressing women’s issues and concerns, and most West Cameroonian newspapers at the time contained content of this kind.¹ These columns, run by formally educated women, featured with some frequency letters by elite urbanites discussing expected norms of behaviour for women. The letters expressed the trepidations of the urban elite in the anglophone West Cameroon State during the 1960s and early 1970s about women’s aesthetic rituals, and reflected underlying anxiety about changing societies and changing gender norms for women.

This article argues that the West Cameroonian urban elite's focus on women's beauty rituals was in fact about women's access to money and status; and about morality, modernity and sexual politics. The article draws on interviews conducted in 2011-12 and 2015-16, as well as newspaper records, to explore how journalists and readers struggled to control women's behaviour by regulating their cosmetic rituals. Letters such as Isuk's mirrored a larger pattern sweeping across newly independent African nations in the 1960s: urban Africans desired to shape their own understanding of cultural identity and modernity, informed by both local and global cultural values. Concerns about skin whitening, dieting, wig wearing, and cosmetics informed trepidations that the 'modern' African woman did not symbolise West Cameroonian cultural identity, not least as formal education became increasingly available for women beyond the wealthiest demographic throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Berger, 2016). The majority of anglophone elites were Protestants, due to the success of missionaries under British rule from 1922 to 1961 (Bowie, 1993). Furthermore, many had formal schooling (being often mission, Nigerian, or Western educated) and/or formal political affiliations, and while they generally applauded women's expanded access to education, their anxiety that women follow traditional gender norms grew in its shadow.² The elite frequently admonished the behaviours of West Cameroonian women who diverged from these norms, and used Christianity and biblical figures to claim moral authority. At times, they contrasted the moral virtues of West Cameroonian women with those of their francophone counterparts in the East Cameroon State. However, the urban elite did not constitute a single ideological bloc, and often women and men had contrasting agendas and divergent understandings associated with the issue of cosmetic rituals.

Early postcolonial African women encountered violence for donning miniskirts, wigs, painted nails, complexion lighteners, and lipstick, which their attackers considered to be symbols of Western decadence and immorality (Decker, 2014: 73). The current article builds on scholarship on this theme by addressing the case of the West Cameroonian 'modern lady' whose modernist aesthetics posed a similar threat. The article makes an important addition to the literature because there remains little scholarship that differentiates between modern womanhood in anglophone and francophone regions of early postcolonial Cameroon. West Cameroonians like Isuk at times accused

the ‘modern lady’ of emulating East Cameroonian women rather than white British women. They rebuked the immorality and sexual looseness of both East Cameroonian and white women alike. The unique experiences of anglophone Cameroonians complicates traditional Africanist scholarship on modern African womanhood by illuminating the legacy of dual colonial rule.

The period this article addresses, 1961 to 1972, corresponds to the period of the Federal Republic of Cameroon which consisted of two socio-politically autonomous states: the West Cameroon State (with British administrative legacies, today the Southwest and Northwest Regions of Cameroon), and the East Cameroon State (with French governing inheritance). The two states had differing cultures, histories, and socio-political outlooks (Ndi, 2005, 2014). Because of French governing influences, the postcolonial Cameroonian federation was in reality a decentralised unitary state in which French values pervaded the federation at the expense of English ones.³ East Cameroon dominated West Cameroon in many respects but the latter’s elites nonetheless sought to protect their national honour and cultural identity, their government’s semblance of political power, and the independence of their newspapers—something East Cameroon newspapers lacked — from the annexationist and hegemonic agenda of the francophone government. The period concluded when, on 24 July 1972, a presidential decree effectively ended West Cameroonian political autonomy and the British and French federal states became a unitary state, although the desire of elites to preserve anglophone cultural identity persisted. Under the unitary state, the hegemonic francophone government shut down or co-opted the newspapers that had flourished in West Cameroon, effectively ending the public discourse in which female journalists and letter writers had participated (Stanbridge and Ljunggren, 2003). Nevertheless, this discourse remains of scholarly interest because of its aims of managing women’s behaviour as a means of protecting national unity, political identity, and anglophone culture in a post-colonial African nation.

West Cameroon was typical of nations in colonial and postcolonial Africa in that members of the educated urban elite saw themselves as the leaders of nation building agendas, and at the forefront of defining morals and respectability (Aderinto, 2015; George, 2014; Jean-Baptiste, 2014). Like Tanganyikan nationalists in the 1930s, they believed that collective African progress depended on the rejection of foreign influence and the creation of

authentic and recognisably indigenous modern cultural forms (Callaci, 2011: 366-7). Moreover, comparable to 1930s Johannesburg, where most Africans lived close to poverty, appearances were especially important in defining class differences and respectability (Thomas, 2006: 478). Formally educated women in urban West Cameroon became the focus of scrutiny, not least because urban elites posited that education increased one's social status such that its beneficiaries should model higher standards of respectable behaviour.

Prevailing ideas about educated women's sexual morality and respectability informed beauty advice. A woman's fertility, chastity, support for children, and effective household management defined and shaped her respectability in urban West Cameroon at this time (Feldman-Savelsberg, 1999; Goheen, 1996; Konde, 2005). Women's adherence to 'proper' gender relations, such as assuming a subservient position in society and respecting the position of men as head of households, churches and communities, were also important factors. Conversely, a stereotype arose in 1960s urban West Cameroon that condemned 'free' or 'loose' urban women, often unmarried, as too Westernised – more specifically, British influenced and sexually loose because they frequented bars, smoked cigarettes, drank beer, wore short skirts and wigs, used too much makeup, and engaged in illicit sexual activities, often with married men (Ndimolo, 1971; Ngafor, 1964; Nkepyah, 1967). Hence, because 'free women' were associated with sexual laxity, a sexually moral and respectable educated woman was to avoid makeup or use it minimally.

At first glance, the newspaper articles I analyse in this article seem to offer contradictory guidance about beauty; the female journalists appear to discourage the use of wigs and all cosmetics while at the same time recommending foreign beauty products.⁴ In reality, they equated *modest* cosmetic use with modernity and social progress. Journalists cautioned readers that the use of too many cosmetics and beauty products concealed their natural beauty, and urged them to wear neutral coloured nail polish and lipstick. The newspapers further illustrate that elite urban men, unlike their female counterparts, frequently invoked pan-Africanism and accused black African women of racial betrayal for whitening their skins and wearing wigs. Single and married men wrote to the women's columns more frequently than women, asking for advice on love and marriage and sharing opinions about women's beauty rituals.⁵ As one male letter writer points out in 1969, "Most men show considerable concern about the morals and the appearance of

our women” (Benato, 1969: 7). Some men believed that women engaged in relationships with wealthy men so as to obtain money to buy beauty products and improve their social standing. Because such behaviour was believed to demonstrate sexual immorality and a subscription to Western beauty standards, the women were not considered ‘authentic Africans’ or deserving of the improved standing that they sought, in contrast to educated women who adhered to sexual restrictions and avoided any or excessive cosmetics. That the men at times compared the former to francophone East Cameroonian women, whom they deemed to be inherently immoral, suggests the complex policing in these critiques: the ‘modern’ West Cameroonian woman was to be formally educated and selectively incorporate modern ideas about gender and beauty, while still preserving the prevalent sexual morals and ideas about ‘African cultural values.’

Drawing on newspapers as sources for the historical opinions of urban elites imposes some complications for the researcher. Information about the writers of letters such as Isuk, beyond the town where the letter originated, is absent. Further, while West Cameroonian newspapers were privately-owned, they were nonetheless subject to state propaganda; the *Cameroon Times* had strong ties to the Kamerun National Democratic Party (KNDP) and other newspapers also had political affiliations. Consequently, unlike Ruff Wanzie of the *Cameroon Times*, who was a government employee and the wife of the secretary of state for primary education, a number of writers of women’s columns wrote under pseudonyms because they feared political retribution (Ney, 2016). In the course of my research, I have not discovered all these women’s identities, but I believe they were similar to Clara Manga, a civil servant writing as ‘Auntie Clara’ for the *Cameroon Champion* or Nkuku Nwigwe who wrote weekly columns as ‘Sister Dolly’ for the *Cameroon Outlook* and ‘Aunty Lizzy’ in the *Cameroon Post*. Nwigwe was formally educated, a former teacher and later a civil servant. As members of political elites, these women might have feared repercussions such as experienced by Cecelia Esemé, who wrote in the *Cameroon Times* and faced a two-count charge of contempt of court in October 1967 because of one of her articles. The women’s columns reflect a distinctive and authentic authorial voice, and readers understood the authors to be educated. The columns at times featured detailed accounts of local women’s organisations’ meetings at which there were no men present. While the sources have limitations, they nonetheless provide a view onto one

set of debates taking place among West Cameroonian urbanite elites in the early postcolonial period.

“Every Woman Is Beautiful”: Beauty Advice and Consumption in Newspapers

Statements about women’s beauty rituals in Anglophone newspapers suggest their political and cultural significance. Women’s columns shared advice on nutrition, weight loss, and self-care in endeavours to shape definitions of the ‘modern lady’ in West Cameroon. This included a plethora of advice about ‘natural’ beauty rituals and beauty products. They claimed that ‘natural beauty’ had pride of place among modern elite West Cameroonian women, condemning wigs, skin-lightening creams, and chemical hair straightening treatments. However, the columnists approved of beauty rituals that did not drastically alter the natural state of a woman’s beauty, such as the use of heat (not chemicals) to straighten hair. For instance, Martha Njoka, a young female journalist in charge of the women’s column for the *Cameroon Outlook*, encouraged young women to “make use of the hair God has given us,” and endorsed natural hair styles, nails without polish, and minimal makeup so as to make one look “neat and attractive” (1969: 6). Maintaining ‘natural beauty’ evidently required the purchase of *some* products. Many of the beauty products journalists recommended came from European countries, such as soaps from the United Kingdom. Consequently, the columnists constructed feminine consumer desire and forged an ideology of domesticity through the demarcation of masculine and feminine spheres. New aesthetic rituals shaped perceptions about the modern African woman who was cosmopolitan and adhered to local standards of respectability (albeit disputed); they were similar to Lynn Thomas’ (2006) description of the Black ‘modern girl’ in 1930s South Africa who was not only international in her focus but endeavoured to seek local respectability. Hence, West Cameroonian female journalists carved new spaces of cultural and political authority for themselves by regulating other women’s behaviours and offering beauty advice.

In a typical piece of advice, Mami Tolma (‘Mami’ is the Cameroonian Pidgin English spelling of ‘mother’), the editor of ‘Women’s World’ for the *Cameroon Observer*, provided guidance on the lipstick colours women should use, as well as advice on nail care, asserting that women should frequently change nail polish colours (1966: 3). Anne Fosah makes similar suggestions

for the 'Women's Bay' column in the *Cameroon Workman* in 1969, describing extensive skincare and hairstyle regimens (1969a: 3). She recommended Oil of Ulay (today Olay), naming a beauty shop that sold the product. She advised against consuming cassava, saying it and other rich foods lead to a poor complexion. Informing her reader that your "face is your fortune," she suggested that salon visits provided a good return on investment, concluding, "You will find in the long run that it will be the most rewarding" (Fosah, 1969b: 3). Such advice alarmed men who wrote letters to female journalists arguing that the economics of women's beauty rituals threatened gender norms within domestic spaces; that is to say, hindered women's successful household management by encouraging them to spend money on beauty products instead of necessary items for the home.

As evident in the preceding commentaries, journalists' advice infused a mix of promotional messages about beauty, modernity, and socioeconomic status. These messages responded in part to global cultural values, as when Mami Tolma counsels women about weight loss, writing, "If your body contour is anything beyond 36-26-36, make sure you do a little exercise every morning. Don't say that your fatness is evidence of good living... 'Miss World' tomorrow can be you... After all, the world is your stage" (1966: 3). Middle-class women in the United States and in the United Kingdom experienced increased pressure to be thin during the 1960s and 1970s, but Cameroonian cultures, then and now, considered a robust shape a measure of health and wealth. Mami Tolma's advice reflects changing ideas among some urbanites that women should be slim and trim like their Western counterparts. The invocation of the Miss World beauty pageant, a mostly Western European and North American phenomenon with little African participation in the 1960s, suggests this Western influence.

Oral evidence suggests that new beauty rituals did confer social success. Several working-class women whom I interviewed, who were in their late teens and early 20s in the 1960s, said that hair straightening was *nyanga* – a Cameroonian Pidgin English term for "putting on airs and graces," "dressing up," or "pretending to be better off than one is" (Todd, 1982: 122). "Women used an iron comb to straighten their hair because the hair would become relaxed. That was the fashion at the time. They would also plait the hair after so when you loosened it, it was soft and curly. These are the things we did to look *nyanga*," said one such woman (Ngum, 2011). Said another, "Women

wanted straight hair... because they wanted to be *nyanga*” (Eyambe, 2011). Using heat to straighten hair was new and cosmopolitan, and it connoted social success and confidence. Women also believed that they looked *nyanga* and displayed elite socioeconomic status by spending money on certain products.

Female journalists also urged their elite counterparts to use little makeup and beauty products as a way to demarcate class boundaries within West Cameroon, and to distinguish between anglophone and francophone Cameroonian women. The preceding oral evidence illustrates why some journalists advocated for the use of minimal makeup so as to prevent class blurring. Lower-class women who endeavored to be *nyanga*, thus “pretending to be better off than one is,” might falsely pass as elite and acquire or enjoy social privileges that critics believed were not rightfully theirs to enjoy. For instance, in a February 1964 column in the *Cameroon Times*, Ruff Wanzie cautions women not to “interpret the word modern to mean unnecessary boldness, *pata-pata* [a sexually suggestive dance style], loud laughter, arrogance, short skirts, too much makeup... A woman should be very proud to hear men, both young and old, even women admire her and say, ‘that’s a well-dressed and nice dame, isn’t she?’” (1964: 3). Additional newspaper evidence also demonstrates that female journalists endeavoured to clearly distinguish between women in the West and East federal states. Martha Njoka advised women in her July 1969 column for the *Cameroon Outlook* that: “The type of dresses I feel girls of our age should wear are not the type the East Cameroon girls come to show us here... your body is the temple of God and you have to preserve it” (1969: 6).

Oral evidence also shows that urbanites in this period considered themselves different from East Cameroonians with respect to morality, modernity, and cultural identity. According to a former civil servant with whom I spoke in 2015, women and men alike believed West Cameroonian women to be more modest, thrifter, and better housekeepers than francophone women. Two other women I interviewed concurred (Zumafor, 2015). They compared the modesty of the traditional African clothing styles West Cameroonian women wore to French clothing styles popular with East Cameroonian women (Ebey, 2011; Yonkeu, 2011). Hence, the highlighted newspaper and oral evidence in this section underline how beauty rituals were embedded in wider socio-cultural and political structures.

“Our Women Have a Very Strange Notion of Beauty”: Male Power, Pan-Africanism and the Perceived Demise of African/Black Culture

Male critics of women’s beauty habits regularly invoked issues related to sexual politics and Pan-Africanism. Like the black men who contributed to *Bantu World*, the first newspaper targeting black South Africans that was established in 1932, West Cameroonian men’s denunciation of women’s cosmetic rituals suggested transatlantic connections and awareness of the socio-political status of black Americans (Thomas, 2006: 471). They invoked a unitary black culture and blamed black African women for hindering the socio-political progress of all blacks. While they applauded women’s educational and professional achievements, these men, unlike female journalists, saw nothing rectifiable in the wearing of makeup.

Male opponents of cosmetics deemed their use to be a means for young women to win the attentions of wealthy men so as to improve their social standing and thereby also continue their beauty consumption. By doing so, such women continually reaffirmed their new social positioning while remaining sexually attractive for their male lovers, who bolstered their own social positioning and masculinity by gaining sexual access to young women whom they deemed beautiful. Consequently, as male letter writers pointed out, young women rebuffed the advances of working-class or non-elite men. Patrick Tataw Obenson, the journalist who wrote ‘Ako-Aya’ a popular satirical column in the *Cameroon Outlook*, equates a woman’s social status to the cosmetic products she can afford. He laments, “My mother loved her husband to the very end and to her my father was her life, her income, her all... But times have changed from then till now and nobody knows what a woman wants” (Obenson, 1971a). He describes an East Cameroonian woman whose social status plummeted when she could no longer have a wealthy man buy skin lightening creams for her, saying ‘Just yesterday this beauty was riding in Mercedes cars in Buea and today she runs after footballers.’⁶ Obenson’s censure of East Cameroonian women’s beauty rituals serves as a cautionary tale of immorality for West Cameroonian women. Additionally, Obenson conflates skin lightening creams with financial standing. Like many beauty products, the creams were expensive and symbolised a new understanding of beauty, attraction, and social success. From Obenson’s perspective, women were negotiating their social visibility through such beauty rituals, becoming visible ornaments to complement and confirm a wealthy man’s social standing.

Obenson's criticisms about women using skin lightening creams to secure financial security with wealthy men also highlights competition among men of various classes for young women. Similar to towns in western and eastern Africa, working-class or non-elite men in urban West Cameroon often competed with 'Big Men' for socio-political authority, including sexual or romantic access to young women. Scholars have shown that the African 'big man' constitutes the most enduring image of masculinity across the continent. Ambitious men worked to enlarge their households and used their "wealth in people" for political and material advancement (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003: 3). Accordingly, in various parts of Africa, male power was (and remains) equated with having livestock, houses, wives, and juvenile dependents (Lindsay and Miescher, 2003: 3). The concentration of power in the hands of 'big men' and male elders leads to power struggles between older and younger men, in which a major source of the tension is women. For instance, in much of sub-Saharan Africa, adolescent women often marry older men, in part because they have the resources to pay bride wealth. Obenson's censures suggests that older men's greater access to younger women comes at the expense of younger working-class or non-elite men who cannot provide the same degree of financial stability and material consumption. Thus, complaints about the economics of women's new beauty rituals were also about concern that lower-class men might not achieve ideal manhood by getting married and financially providing for their own households.

Male critics also alluded to the dissolution of a certain 'African pride' in their letters. Martin Ngum, a resident of Limbe, writes to the *Cameroon Times*: "White ladies with various colours of hair could, with success, buy wigs of any colour, but not African women. After all, our women don't look beautiful in these wigs. They only expose themselves to criticism. So let wigs give way to simple Cameroonian hairdo" (Ngum, 1968: 2). Obenson (1971b) similarly laments in a column, "Europeans are forming this hatred for our colour for their own purposes. How else can I explain this when many dark Cameroon beauties have suddenly become 'white'... Let us be proud of our colour and not imitate foolish things." Both authors assert that wigs and skin bleaching are a violation of God's will and call upon women to disassociate from Western products and cultural values.

While Ngum and Obenson accuse women of being race-traitors and 'un-African' in their beauty practices, their commentaries reveal a selective

and gendered definition of the so-called ‘un-African’. As Marc Epprecht (2008) argues in his work on sexuality in Africa, colonial rule and political and cultural nationalism have shaped the evolution and transformation of the idea of ‘un-Africanness.’ Ideas about African authenticity often regurgitate colonial stereotypes about Africans. Yet these ideas are not stagnant or uncontested. Female journalists in West Cameroon maintained that, if carefully utilised, cosmetics and beauty products could define the modern African lady who was still traditional, Christian, and sexually moral. On the other hand, men such as Ngum and Obenson saw these rituals as by definition Westernised and so constituting cultural and racial betrayal, even as they accepted Christianity as African and as a barometer for traditional morals. From their viewpoints, it was women who were responsible for safeguarding cultural identity, which they failed to do so when engaging with un-African beauty practices.

A lengthy letter from Buea to the *Cameroon Telegraph* in May 1969 further encapsulates larger concerns among men about the loss of male authority over women and the loss of black culture on the global level. Appearing in the ‘Women’s Page,’ Benato’s letter pontificates at length, stating that “women beautify themselves for the eyes and hearts of men. We men have taken too long to tell some of our women that most of them [who use] makeup and who think they are fashionable look like masquerades” (1969: 7). Benato infers that men alone have the ultimate power to judge women’s beauty, and connects the new beauty rituals of women to falseness. The economics of wigs and cosmetics also makes a strong appearance in his discourse: “Few men have the money to put into wigs and other artificial devices which falsify and distort our personality.” Benato does not admit the possibility that women themselves afford these luxuries, even though women were increasingly earning their own money at the time. He assumes a script in which a man evaluates the woman under the wig as a potential wife who would demand he pay for the accoutrement. He proposes that women ‘return’ to traditional African cultural values while also cautioning that this “does not mean casting away everything that is foreign.” He concedes that Cameroonians are suffering from an inferiority complex: “The White man’s educational system brainwashed us to hate even our very selves... That is why our women want the White man’s red face and complexion... And that is why our modern men sit back and pretend to admire these oddities.” Here Benato suggests that European colonialism informed feelings of self-

hatred among African women who endeavour to achieve white-dominated standards of beauty; they purportedly modify their phenotype and adhere to false assumptions that black physical traits are not beautiful. However, he also denounces men for propagating low self-esteem among Africans by internalising the white ideal image of women's beauty. He implies that modern African men who mimic European behaviours embolden African women to live up to the externally imposed beauty standard so as to please men. Hence, Benato perceived *both* women's and men's alleged preference for white beauty as a sickness, a self-hatred to be overcome.

Benato (1969) also makes a larger argument that black pride in general is disintegrating because of specific beauty rituals that African descendants in the U.S. and African women engage in. He narrates:

The story began many years ago when white men treated the black man as beats [local vernacular: a group to be abused] and tried to justify slavery. As a reaction, Afro-Americans began to imitate white men to aspire to whiteness... They have red skins, stretched hair, red lips, and deformed noses... Let us do something to save our Afro-American colleagues who are now fighting for selfhood, manhood, and equal rights.

According to Benato, West Cameroonian women, like black Americans, express racial self-loathing that is born out of European cultural hegemony. He invokes pan-Africanism and the civil rights movement that was raging in the United States at the time to suggest that West Cameroonian women and men must also regain their personhood and black pride. Scholarship on pan-Africanism in the mid-20th century concludes that, for educated Africans, racial assertion was a response to feelings of humiliation, an expression of race pride and an important 'consciousness-raising' phase in the development of a more coherent political awareness of the structural factors of oppression (Bush, 1999: 15). However, various scholars have cautioned that pan-Africanism has a history as a relatively masculinist discourse that seeks to restore masculine pride, power and self determination to black men (Reddock, 2014: 66). This masculine ideological narrative sought to subordinate black women, and reinforced existing customs and views about them. Benato encourages masculine initiatives and male authority by suggesting that women heed men's demands to condemn 'strange makeup' and thereby prevent the degeneration of African cultural identity, and, with this, black

pride and culture on a global level. Statements from Benato, Ngum and Obenson thus reflected men's anxiety about westernisation and their loss of cultural and economic power over women. The invocation of Christianity as a measurement of women's authenticity and morals further supports and evidences the patriarchal assumptions unpinning their commentaries.

Conclusion

This article argues that West Cameroonian urban elite's focus on women's beauty rituals during the early period of independence in the Federated State of West Cameroon was in fact about women's changing social and cultural norms. Female journalists and male letter-writers specifically honed in on morality, sexuality, modernity and women's growing economic power. Moreover, reproach against women's beauty rituals, such as skin whitening, dieting, wig wearing, and the use of cosmetics, reflected apprehensions about the 'modern lady,' and how well she symbolised West Cameroonian cultural identity within the francophone dominated Cameroonian Federal Republic and on the international level. Therefore, female journalists and male urbanites who wrote in or to newspapers endeavoured to carve spaces of cultural authority for themselves by offering advice on what they deemed to be proper and 'natural' beauty rituals for women. Both parties were invested in defining the 'modern lady' so as to distinguish her from her East Cameroonian counterpart. Evidence of West Cameroonian women's singular virtue was deemed an important way by which they could prove their respectability and sexual morality. Though female journalists recommended selective beauty products for purchase, they cautioned women to use minimal cosmetics so as to maintain their natural beauty. Contrariwise, men wholly reproved women whom they alleged were imitating British beauty rituals, and accused them of thereby losing West Cameroonian cultural identity and values. They further maintained that women's actions contributed to the loss of black pride globally. This article has therefore contributed to the growing understanding of how globalising consumer capitalism and globalised modernity has structured social life for women in urban Africa, pointing to the long history of these processes, in this case in English-speaking West Cameroon.

Acknowledgements

As part of a broader study of gender and political identity in Cameroon, research for this paper was supported by the Baylor Summer Sabbaticals, Purdue University Research Foundation Research Grant and the Bernadotte E. Schmitt Grant (American Historical Association). I wish to gratefully acknowledge this support and the generous assistance of the staff of the National Archives of Cameroon in Buea and the National Archives in the UK. I wish to thank Alicia C. Decker, the two anonymous reviewers, Simidele Dosekun, Kate Epstein, Ellen Gruenbaum, Whitney Walton and Konrad Tuchscherer for their comments and suggestions for revision.

Endnotes

- 1 The *Cameroon Times*, founded in 1960, was a tri-weekly publication with about 8,000 copies printed per issue at its peak in the mid-1960s. The paper closed temporarily in 1968, then permanently in 1982.
- 2 Elite families in West Cameroon often sent their daughters to Nigeria for post-primary education in the 1950s and 1960s because of fewer options for young women in anglophone Cameroon.
- 3 For instance, the attempted Frenchification of the West Cameroon State influenced the Highway Code, monetary policies, and the system of political administration.
- 4 The fact that female journalists often promoted foreign beauty products illuminates the particular psychology of consumer culture in urban West Cameroon. Female journalists perceived European beauty products as working better and being more prestigious than local ones. Moreover, there was a degree of trust in the quality of authentic European or North American brands, unlike some African counterfeits from Nigeria or other local beauty products.
- 5 Perhaps this speaks to the reality of disparities in formal educational opportunities for anglophone Cameroonian men and women that have existed since the 1960s. Women achieved lower levels of formal education than men because of their domestic role (defined by tradition and society) and the preference for marriage over education imposed on them, coupled with general societal prejudice against the education of women.
- 6 Some scholars assert that there was an influx of prostitutes from East to West Cameroon when the Tiko-Douala highway connecting both states was constructed in the early 1960s.

References

- Aderinto, Saheed. 2015. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1958*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press.
- Benato, David. 1969. "A Rejoinder." *Cameroon Telegraph*, 1 May.
- Berger, Iris E. 2016. *Women in Twentieth-Century Africa*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowie, Fiona. 1993. "The Elusive Christian Family: Missionary Attempts to Define Women's Roles: Case Studies from Cameroon", in Bowie, F., Kirkwood, D. and Ardener, S. eds. *Women and Missions: Past and Present: Anthropological and Historical Perceptions*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Bush, Barbara. 1999. *Imperialism, Race, and Resistance: Africa and Britain, 1919-1945*. Oxfordshire, UK: Routledge.
- Callaci, Emily. 2011. "Dancehall Politics: Mobility, Sexuality, and Spectacles of Racial Respectability in Late Colonial Tanganyika, 1930s-1961", *The Journal of African History* 52(3): 365-384.
- Decker, Alicia C. 2014. *In Idi Amin's Shadow: Women, Gender, and Militarism in Uganda*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Doh, Emmanuel F. 2014. *Anglophone-Cameroon Literature: An Introduction*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Ebey, Asong Martha. 2011. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Buea, Cameroon, 8 November 2011.
- Epprecht, Marc. 2008. *Heterosexual Africa?* Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Eyambe, Bekene (pseud.). 2011. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Buea, Cameroon, 8 November 2011.
- Feldman-Savelsberg, Pamela. 1999. *Plundered Kitchens, Empty Wombs: Threatened Reproduction and Identity in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Fosah, Anne D. 1969a. "Women's Bay: Every Woman With a Young and Lovely Complexion." *Cameroon Workman*, 18 August.
- Fosah, Anne D. 1969b. "Women's Bay: On Fashion With Mrs. Fosah." *Cameroon Workman*, 26 September.
- George, Abosede A. 2014. *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Goheen, Miriam. 1996. *Men Own the Fields, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Isuk, Augustine. 1964. "Women with Claws." *Cameroon Times*, 16 May.
- Jean-Baptiste, Rachel. 2014. *Conjugal Rights: Marriage, Sexuality, and Urban Life in Colonial Libreville, Gabon*. Athens: Ohio University Press.

- Konde, Emmanuel. 2005. *African Women and Politics: Knowledge, Gender, and Power in Male-Dominated Cameroon*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press.
- Lindsay, Lisa and Miescher, Stephan. 2003. *Men and Masculinities in Modern Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Ndi, Anthony. 2005. *The Golden Age of Southern (West) Cameroon, 1946-1972: Impact of Christianity*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing.
- Ndi, Anthony. 2014. *Southern West Cameroon Revisited (1950-1972) Volume One: Unveiling Inescapable Traps*. Bamenda, Cameroon: Langaa Research and Publishing.
- Ndimolo, Vincent C. 1971. "Free Girls, Their Parents Versus Moral Society." *The Hero*, 13 September.
- Ney, Poubom L. 2016. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Buea, Cameroon, 18 April 2016.
- Ngafor, Martin S. 1964. "Women of Pleasure." *Cameroon Times*, 5 September.
- Ngum, Fidelia (pseud.). 2011. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Buea, Cameroon, 4 November 2011.
- Ngum, Martin. 1968. "Do Wigs Add Beauty?" *Cameroon Express*, 19 September.
- Njoka, Martha. 1969. "Untitled Column." *Cameroon Outlook*, 11 July.
- Nkpeyah, P. J. 1967. "Tax Free Women." *Cameroon Times*, 9 February.
- Obsenson, Patrick Tataw. 1971a. "Na War-O." *Cameroon Outlook*, 24 February.
- . 1971b. "Changing Colours." *Cameroon Outlook*, 15 June.
- Reddock, Rhoda. 2014. "The First Mrs. Garvey: Pan-Africanism and Feminism in the Early 20th Century", *Feminist Africa* 19: 58-77.
- Stanbridge, Roland, and Ljunggren, Maria. 2003. *African Media and ICT4D: Documentary Evidence: A Baseline Study on the State of Media Reporting on ICT and Information Society Issues in Africa*. New York: United Nations.
- Thomas, Lynn. 2006. "The Modern Girl and Racial Respectability in 1930s South Africa", *Journal of African History* 47(3): 461-490.
- Todd, Loreto. 1982. *Cameroon*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing.
- Tolma, Mami. 1966. "Women's World: Every Woman is Beautiful." *Cameroon Observer*, 2 July.
- Wanzie, Ruff. 1964. "Fashion Parade." *Cameroon Times*, 22 February.
- Yonkeu, Vanessa (pseud.). 2011. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 24 September 2011.
- Zumafor, Anthony Y. 2015. Interview by Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué, Buea, Cameroon, 30 July 2015.