

COERCION AND VIOLENCE IN GERMAN LABOR CONSCRIPTION IN CAMEROON, 1880s-1914

Henry Kam Kah¹
Emmanuel E. Kengo²



Introduction

Cameroon is officially bilingual with English and French used in public administration and in business. It is multi-ethnic and multi-lingual consisting of over 250 ethnic polities that make it aptly described as “a babble of tongues”. Its location straddles the Central and West African sub-regions. The ecological zones of the country include the Sahel, Savanna and forest. Through this, the country has been nicknamed “Africa in miniature” (Fanso 2017, 9). The country has a triple colonial heritage. It was first annexed in July 1884 by Germany. After the German defeat in World War I, the country, like other German colonies, was seized from Germany and eventually partitioned into two unequal halves by Britain and France after a botched condominium. The economic foundation of the territory during the colonial period was laid by the Germans. Labour played a cutting-edge role in this German economic enterprise in Cameroon. The conscription and treatment of labour in the country and other German colonies was barbaric and dehumanising to say the least. This paper discusses this poor labour treatment and the ramifications on the population and in the redefinition of German labour policy in the territory.

¹ Department of History and African Civilisations, University of Buea. Buea, Cameroon.
Email: henry.kah@ubuea.cm.

² Department of History and African Civilisations, University of Buea. Buea, Cameroon.
Email: emmakengo@yahoo.com.

Germany essentially had a three-fold agenda in its African colonial possessions of Tanganyika, Kamerun, Togoland and South West Africa (Cana 1915, 356-357). One of these was to create a true colony in South Africa where it would control as much of that region as possible. This was because of the region's suitability for permanent settlement of whites. The second reason for German interest to establish permanent colonies in Africa was motivated by H.M. Stanley's discovery or so of the course of the Congo. Such discovery led Germany to increase its interest in the acquisition of plantation colonies in equatorial Africa. It also wanted outlets for commerce and harbours and coal stations for the German navy and marine mercantile. Their third objective of wanting colonies in Africa was to obtain a strategic base on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. Such a base would enable Germany to successfully become a menace to sea routes to South America, West and South Africa for its own benefit.

There was also general consensus in the German colonial philosophy that plantations and German settlers should make use of African labour as the mainstay of colonial production before 1905. In East Africa for example, German colonial authorities demanded from ethnic groups free labour and monthly tribute in ivory, livestock or foodstuffs. This was meant to support the construction of military fortifications to serve as bases of exploitation. The Wasukuma of Usukuma for example, ignored this and went ahead to attack German government and missionary caravans that traversed their territory and carted away property. The German response against them was ruthless (Itandala 1992, 9; Stearns 2008, 134). It was after the *Maji Maji* revolt of 1905-1907 in German East Africa that policy makers turned away from the direct use of force to procure workers. This revolt was the first united inter-ethnic opposition to brutal colonial rule, a result of a policy of forced labour on cotton plantations (Sunseri 2003, 430). The German greatest challenge was how the sparsely populated people would be used for the production of cotton, sisal, coffee, rubber and also food crops for various families (Sunseri 2001, 46).

German colonial policy in Togoland was diverse and included government exaction of compulsory labour, severe punishment, imposition of several direct taxes and restraint against the people's involvement in trade. The German colonial officials infringed on the people's right to land. Land alienation was pursued as a form of punishment for the Togolese (Amenumey 1969, 67). Indigenous groups resented the German *corvée* in Togoland. One effective form of resistance was that the people moved with their families to remote parts of the colony where they would be free from the press-gang. Large numbers of people also migrated to the adjacent British territory of the Gold Coast. By doing so, it increased the difficulty of obtaining labour by German colonial officials for different economic groups. The burden on those

who stayed back became heavy and unbearable (Gray 1919, 29). Problems of Togolandese increased over the years because colonial authorities depended on their labour, excessive and arbitrary taxation to construct railways, roads and the telegraph system in their land (Laumann 2003, 196). This was a heavy price paid for being under German suzerainty. While those who could not stand it escaped into rural enclaves, others crossed the border into British territory thereby frustrating German economic interests.

German labour policy in Cameroon and East Africa was particularly unique in all its African colonies. Labour recruitment to the plantations was generally through coercion (Nana 2016, 173). This German attitude towards labour was captured in pictures showing prisoners being hanged or of forced labour scenes representing the life of the indigenous population as if it was natural for them to be treated through brute force (Kössler and Melber 2004, 23). Apart from the fact that they were recruited by force, indigenous production of the crops cultivated was discouraged. Cameroon was so peculiar that it became known as “The Land of the Twenty Five.” This was due to the regular number of blows that were inflicted on labour including a heavy whip for minor transgressions (Charteris 1937, 21). The Germans wanted to develop the resources of Cameroon based essentially on their culture of work. They needed labour at all costs including the use of force and to subject this labour to the work ethics of Europe (Rudin 1938, 318). This use of violence has been conceptualised for better understanding.

Conceptualising Violence

Violence has been theoretically debated over a long time. In the long tradition of western thought the explanation of violence has an ideological basis. Although it is ubiquitous, violence is often qualified as a problematic anomaly. It's also been described as “a non-rational uncontrolled mode of action signifying a regression to a wild state of nature (Abbink 1998, 271-272).” Malesevic has described violence as a social relation between two or more living organisms which is not fixed but historically generated, structurally shaped and ideologically framed (Malesevic 2015, 2). On his part, Dewey contends that violence is the intentional use of force to injure or kill (Dewey 2016). Galtung further opines that violence is “the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is (Galtung 1969, 168).” These conceptualisations of violence show that there are divergences in its contextual meaning but also a point of convergence. For violence to take place it must be between two or more persons and make them behave without rationalising their action.

During conscription of labour in Cameroon, the Germans used coercion and violence for various economic interests. Excessive violence was used to recruit labour from the hinterlands of Cameroon for the plantations along the coast. Competition for scarce labour between traders and planters, other economic operators and government services eventually led to a review of policy after 1906 and for government regulation of this activity to pre-empt further chaos. Labour conscription prior to government regulation was uncontrollable. Labour recruiters and their agents acted like wild beasts. Competitors for labour used brute force to obtain it, failing which they would have failed in their mission in Cameroon, namely, to exploit natural and human resources. Social relations between Cameroonians and Germans were poor due to brutish labour recruitment. Many involuntarily offered services to commercial plantations as porters or guards but were compelled to do so. Due to coercion, several resistances were organised in several parts of the country against the German administration. The intentional use of force as discussed by Dewey (2016) had an ideological backing. This was because of the Germans' feeling of superiority to Cameroonians. There was also an actual difference between potential action of Germans with regards to labour conscription and reality in the field. It was a sad experience and pointed to actual or practical German treatment of labour in Cameroon.

Relevance of study and early labour incorporation

The relevance of this paper today cannot be overemphasised. In 2004, which coincided with centenary of genocide on the Herero and Nama people of Namibia orchestrated by German administrators, interest was rekindled among Namibians to better appreciate German atrocities in South West Africa (Peraudin and Zimmerer 2011, 1). Colonial army extermination of the main labour force in 1904 created a labour shortage that lasted for years, to the disadvantage of the coloniser. In spite of promises to Nama groups to elicit their surrender, they were deported to concentration camps and conscripted into forced labour. They were also underfed, ill-clothed and badly accommodated. As a result, thousands of prisoners died from sheer neglect or from exertions of forced labour (Kössler and Melber 2004, 23). The commemoration of this genocide in 2004, called into serious interrogation overall German colonial labour policy not only in Namibia but on her other colonial possessions in Africa namely Kamerun, Tanganyika and Togoland. The dehumanising treatment of Herero and Nama ethnic groups and the war of extermination launched on them was unparalleled barbarism in colonial labour policy in Africa. This needs to be

recognised by the German government and be ready to pay reparations for the atonement of their sins in colonial possessions in Africa.

In addition, in Cameroon like Togoland, German colonial officials opposed those merchants whose interests they presumably represented (Steinmetz 2008, 595). This is a paradox when one remembers how ruthless Governor Jesko Von Puttkamer was in pursuit of the labour policy in Cameroon. He literally turned the country into a concessionary enterprise. The Togolese today are increasingly conscious of the fact that their ancestors were forcibly displaced from their original settlements for forced labour in the construction of railways, roads, buildings, wharfs among others essentially for the benefit of German colonial economic interests (Azamede n.d., 68). In fact, the main instruments of German colonialism were rape, extermination order, forced labour and theft of land (Mushaandja n.d., 37), which differed from one colony to the other in Africa. All these point to the supreme price that indigenous people across Africa paid for enduring German colonial rule. This cruelty or barbarism of a people over another will forever remain in the psyche and social memory of generations yet unborn. For this reason, there is a need for a new world order where the very strong are prevented from annihilating the weak and vulnerable for selfish purposes.

The early general need for labour in Cameroon was for plantation work, transportation of goods and to clear the jungle for railroads. In the domain of plantation work, German officials were favourable to its growth from the outset. Colonial rulers made land and labour available to planters through non-market mechanisms at the expense of African competition (Clarence-Smith 1993, 188 and 190). There also emerged very stiff competition for labour between German planters and traders. Government services needed labour as couriers, carriers for expeditions, construction sites and as railroad workers (Rudin 1938, 316-317; Tem 2018, 2). There was an ever increasing need for labourers to work on the plantations in Cameroon, tap wild rubber, carry loads, construct railways and perform a number of associated tasks (Gann and Duignan 1977, 167). The establishment of administrative posts and commercial centres also needed labour to work in them (Fonlon 1969, 33), which was often generally obtained through force and not free will. This was often the case because from the German occupation of Cameroon voluntary labour was insufficient in number (Oyono 2013) to do the work that was available.

Around 1870 prior to the annexation of Cameroon by Germany onwards, Cameroon's western grassfields, like other hinterland areas, were increasingly incorporated into a larger geographical division of labour. This was due to the advance of the European trading frontier into the hinterlands of the country. The western grassfields economic importance continued into

German annexation and administration. It became a serious, competitive and permanent source of labour for different economic activities pursued by the German economic class. Enforced labour conscription policies led to new plantations on the coast. It also replaced the sale of slaves and undermined the pre-eminent position of local elites (Rowlands 1979, 4). German colonial officials succeeded to put in place a highly organised plantation economy which was on constant pressure to recruit labour from the denser inland population (Ardener 1962, 343) on a voluntary basis, as penal labour rounded up in punitive expeditions or provided by chiefs on contract (Nkwi 1989, 17).

In the early years of German administration in Douala like elsewhere in Cameroon, workers came from several African countries and later from the hinterlands of German Kamerun. Among the supplying countries were Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Dahomey (present day Benin), Ghana, Liberia (especially Krumen, Wey and Bassa) and Togo. Within Cameroon, labour came from several places that included the Ewondo-Beti, Bamileke, Hausa, Bakundu, Kribi, western and eastern grassfields areas (Schler 2005, 96; Ebune 2015, 112; Eckert 1998, 139; Okia 2014, 176; Ardener 1996, 162; Nkwi 1989, v; Nfi 2016, 2; Austen 1983, 16; Müllendorff 1902, 72). Some ethnic groups like Bali, Bamum and Ewondo did not confront plantation owners and recruiters because they collaborated with them to ease labour conscription (Richardson 1999, 146). Some of them used the colonial dispensation to migrate away from densely populated and less developed grassfields to the coastal plantations created by the Germans (Konings and Nyamnjoh 2003, 14). Others had been providing services to Douala agricultural and trading ventures prior to the advent of the Germans (Eckert 1998, 139). During the colonial period, some of them were dockworkers, porters, manual labourers and civil servants. Among these people were those brought to a city like Douala as prisoners, soldiers or forced labour (Schler 2005, 96).

Following exploration in the western grassfields in 1888-1889, Eugene Zintgraff reported about the abundance of cheaper labour than that recruited from Monrovia or Accra. He proposed the use of penal labour to clear and prepare plantation estates (Nkwi 1989, 13). This report triggered labour recruitment in the grassfields which was often a very risky venture (Richardson 1999, 144). The friendship pact with Fon Galega in 1891 made the traditional ruler control the western grassfields under German protection. He promised the Germans that he would do everything within his powers to supply colonial authorities with men for the plantations (Njoh 2002, 411). Defeated ethnic groups were required to supply labour or private recruiters contracted chiefs to supply workers for specific periods. The chiefs also collected labour tax and mobilised it for communal activities (Eyong 2007, 55). The wider implication

of all these was dethronement, imprisonment or death by execution (Ardener 1996, 162; Nana 2016, 173 and 191). In spite of this pact, Fon Galega soon began to complain regularly of excessive mortality on the plantations, and from time to time cut off supplies of labour in response to this. The missionaries described this as disguised slavery which promoted slave raiding and trading (Clarence-Smith 1993, 200).

The German colonial administration also grappled with competition for labour between planters and traders who both needed it to exploit wild rubber. The planters and traders were in high and deadly competition for labour from the hinterlands. Traders needed porters and without labour supply it was to be a herculean task to supply goods from the coast to the hinterlands with communication at a major handicap. What were available were mostly footpaths in a majority of the hinterlands. In 1913 alone, over 80,000 porters including men, women and children were in the pay of traders transporting rubber between Kribi and Yaounde (Rudin 1938, 316; Epale 1985, 50). Some porters menaced villagers whose territory they traversed, making many of them escape to neighbouring countries. They often conscripted or molested the population. It took the German colonial administration to place restrictions on the exit of the population to these countries (Epale 1985, 50). When the situation became more precarious, in 1913 private recruitment of labour was discontinued by the government who took upon itself the responsibility of regulating this sector. However, tax delinquents were still used by private employers (Ardener 1996, 162) even with government regulation. It is also interesting to note that even when the government started to regulate labour procurement in 1913, the Bakweri for example, were still being subjected to systematic forced labour for the estates (Clarence-Smith 1993, 209).

Labour challenges, coercion and violence

From the onset of German administration in Cameroon, there was the challenge of raising enough money for administration, public works and for enough plantation labour (Ngam 2017, 2). This was compounded by resistance to German efforts to conscript labour from different ethnic groups. Several of these ethnic groups in the grassfields could not forgive the Germans for ruthless suppression of resistance against them. German planters never relented on the recruitment of resilient, faithful and loyal labour (Ibid., 5). Beti people from the initial encounter with the Germans in 1887 resisted them. They did this by retreating into the forest as the work gang recruiters approached their area (Quinn 1973, 722). Others like Fang however supported the Germans.

For example, during an expedition into the interior in 1889 Captain Kund was accompanied by Fang porters ("The Cameroon District..." 1889, 211) without which this expedition would have encountered a lot of difficulties.

From 1906 to 1914, Cameroonians devised passive and active ways of resisting the Germans from expropriating their land, forced labour in German firms or administration, recruitment for unpaid labour on road and bridge projects and imposition of taxes. Whenever people got wind of a recruiting party in their area, all able-bodied men left the village in rejection of recruitment. In many cases, people abandoned or deserted their villages or escaped the payment of taxes and forced labour. They took up residence in tropical forests or escaped into neighbouring British or French territory of Nigeria or other countries of French Equatorial Africa. This was all in a bid to evade possible recruitment into portage for several German firms and businesses (Stoecker 1986, 169-170). Some labour recruiters went to the field with followers disguised as soldiers. They gave bribes to chiefs in the form of money or alcohol. The recruitment methods that they used gave rise to outbursts of violence especially in the neighbourhood of Yaounde and Ossidinge in the present-day Mamfe area. In 1900 and 1907 labour recruiters were murdered (Clarence-Smith 1993, 201). This was the challenge many of these recruiters went through for daring to forcibly get labour for German economic interests in Cameroon.

Coercion and violence were used to recruit workers in German plantations in Cameroon like elsewhere in Africa. Africans were considered as animals to be used for labour and shot down like mad dogs if they dared to assert their claim of man or womanhood. Such a sickening graphic picture was captured in the editorial of *The African Telegraph* and *Gold Coast Mirror* of December 2014 (Njung 2016, 146). Governor Jesko von Puttkamer as an ardent proponent of forced labour supported this inhumane treatment of labour (Clarence-Smith 1993, 192). He became governor in 1895 and was in this position for eleven years as an autocrat. It was alleged that he had a personal financial stake in plantation companies which was never proven (Ibid., 192, 196-197). Under his long period of governorship in Cameroon, Jesko von Puttkamer ordered soldiers to raid and capture people for colonial services. Captured men were subjected to forced labour while females were kept for the pleasures of Europeans and soldiers (Gwanfogbe 1995, 72). Still under his administration, Cameroonians went through provocation and all kinds of humiliation. They were flogged, subjected to forced labour, paid taxes and were pushed into other social ills (Ngam 2017, 6). Some soldiers dispatched into the hinterlands by the colonial administration were assigned the task of recruiting labour to perform tasks in the plantations (Gwanfogbe 1995, 183). German punitive raids and defeat of Nso in the Bamenda western

grassfields between April and June 1906 led to the establishment of a patrol in Kumbo. This was charged with supervising forced labour on the road that linked Bamenda and Banyo (Chilver and Kaberry 1960, 8).

Governor Puttkamer promoted concessionary enterprise in Cameroon, made use of penal labour for this purpose and was angry with the attitude of some chiefs. In 1894 close to half of the labourers on the *Kamerun Land und Plantagen Gesellschaft* (KLPG) plantation were Ewondo penal labourers. Hundreds of people from rebellious ethnic groups including women and children were punished through work in the plantations. In one case, Bulu workers were sent to work in these plantations for six years for no pay. They were, however, paid something far below the standard wage for regularly recruited people (Clarence-Smith 1993, 200-201). Puttkamer also argued that chiefs were reluctant to send their best men to work in European employment. They would despatch the weakest they found (Gann and Duignan 1977, 169) showing a kind of rebellion against German economic enterprise. His favourite plantation, where he was also shareholder, though contested elsewhere, *Westafrikanische Pflanzungsgesellschaft Victoria* or the West African Plantation Company (WAPV) abusively seized land and subjected people to forced labour with utmost cruelty. Some people who lost their land to it, were forced into reservation in total disregard of their freedom of choice (Stearns 2008, 135). The German system of forced labour as it was generally applied in Cameroon made for cheap labour services ("Notes on the Cameroons..." 1916, 403-406). Constant pressure on the colonial government to recruit labour from densely populated areas led to social upheavals throughout the period of German administration in Cameroon (Ardener 1962, 343). The manner in which labour was recruited and transported from the western grassfields for instance provoked bewilderment (Ngam 2017, 10).

Chiefs who would not stand the German onslaught during wars of resistance were forced into loyal collaborators. They had no other option than to do so. Several of them were more or less coerced into signing treaties of friendship and swore to collect taxes for the Germans, assist in coordination of public activities and recruit labour for the planters (Ibid., 4). Others did not out-rightly resist the cruel German labour policy. Rather, they got into an entente and promised to supply labour even from neighbouring chiefdoms. With the official ban on slavery, the Germans smartly negotiated with the Fon of Bali in 1891 for a constant supply of labour. This enabled free Bali men to take along with them domestic or purchased slaves for the plantations. In return, the Fon of Bali was paid part of the labourers' wages. He also received presents, firearms and kept an alliance with the Germans to suppress his rivals in the Grassfields. This arrangement was rather erratic from

1897 and benefited the *Westafrikanische Pflanzungsgesellschaft Victoria* (WAPV) (Clarence-Smith 1993, 200) more than the Fon of Bali or his free men.

Through the treaty signed by Fon Galega I with the Germans, he was expected to extort toll and taxes from his Widekum neighbours. He also served as a major recruiter of labour for the Germans using all kinds of unorthodox means. Due to his unflinching collaboration, Dr Max Esser of the WAPV signed an agreement with him in 1896. Through this strategic agreement, he was given 100 Bali men for the plantations. They got to the coast the following year in July (Epale 1985, 48-49). The Bali did it by ensuring that there was a constant supply of labour from several grassfields chiefdoms that came under the control of Fon Galega. They were to perform tasks in the German plantations, government work and services (Niba 1995, 65). This placed Bali in a privileged position over other grassfields fondoms during the era of German administration.

Examples of companies and plantations that abused labour during recruitment and during work in these companies abound. The *Gesellschaft Sud Kamerun*, for example, used wages and forces to assemble their workers. With the blessing of the government, when other recruitment methods did not work out, to work on the plantations served as a penalty and the people were sent to spend jail terms. In fact, those who were condemned to serve jail sentences for crimes and misdemeanours were sent to work punishment as plantation workers for these crimes (Richardson 1999; Rudin 1938, 320; Schaper 2009, 24). Due to the high need for labour in the plantations, planters admonished the government to get labour from the hinterlands of Cameroon and to make them sign contracts of three or five years (Rudin 1938, 320).

German brutal treatment of labour reached an apex during the period leading to the First World War. Around this time, Germans raided for labour and porters to serve their interests on a regular basis. Fons were also compelled to provide men for different labour services and portage. This made them unpopular among their people (Ngam 2017, 9). Government had taken over recruitment of labour in 1913 on the understanding that they would better the lot of the people but this was not to be. Abuses on labour still continued. Labour needs increased because this was needed not only for plantation work but also for government work, like in road work. Men were still obtained by forced levy but were used for a variety of tasks (Richardson 1999, 146). The government's extradition, though onerous, ceased to be arbitrary and was strictly regulated, so Africans at last came to be looked upon as economic men rather than as merely savages (Gann and Duignan 1977, 170). There were consequences of this reckless use of coercion and violence by different stakeholders in the German economic interests in Cameroon.

Consequences

The consequences of coercion and violence in German labour conscription were telling on the sociocultural and economic fabric of the Cameroonian society. Among the Bakweri for instance, after the Germans had subdued them in 1894, they were forced into densely packed villages, were imposed a huge fine which included slave labour in the construction of the government station in Buea which overlooked Buea Town, Small and Great Soppo (Njoh 2002, 408; Ardener 1996, 116). The coercion of the Bakweri into manual labour following their defeat led to greater resistance because this took place on their expropriated land. Bakweri people were not willing to work for the German plantations and the latter looked for labour elsewhere. This was to do the job that had been rejected by the Bakweri in anguish.

The arrival and acceptance of labour from elsewhere to do the job so rejected by the Bakweri led to a love-hate relationship for these other ethnic groups by the disgruntled Bakwerians. The other ethnic groups were accused of collaboration with their oppressors, the Germans (Dibussi n.d., 5-6). The resistance of the Bakweri to conscript labour capitulated because following peace terms that concluded the war with them in 1894, the people agreed to at any time put at the disposal of the District Officer in Victoria 400 labourers against a monthly pay of 7 marks and free maintenance (Ardener 1996, 115). To say the least, the Bakweri worked on the plantations as forced labour (*Ibid.*, 150), like other ethnic groups but their number was not enough to serve all these plantations. As late as 1913 they were still being subjected to systematic forced labour for the estates. The population of the country was seriously being competed for requirements of plantations, peasant cash crop production, wild rubber collection, portage and railway building (Clarence-Smith 1993, 209).

The labour so generally forcibly recruited from different ethnic groups in the hinterlands of Cameroon could not be paid the wage that could reproduce their labour power. One German scholar H. Winkler captured this scenario and other related problems of labour under German rule in Cameroon in the following words: "Starvation wages, excessively long hours, malnutrition, poor shelter, female and child labour, the breakdown of family life, an early death, floggings and chains – such was the fate of the workers in Cameroon (Stoecker 1986, 168)." From Winkler's remarks, the people forcibly recruited received wages that were only enough to starve them to death. The long hours of work were never appropriately remunerated and the people could not feed well which explains why there was early death. Mortality rates in the plantations reached new heights. In 1913 for example, a doctor demanded that recruitment be suspended after two terrible instances of plan-

tation mortality, one of 30.5 % over seven months and the other 20.6% over three months (Clarence-Smith 1993, 210). The shelter provided for plantation labour was poor. Women and children were exploited and where a man had been conscripted to work for a specified period, he was separated from the family and this explains the breakdown in family life. Added to this litany of problems was flogging of labour for minor and other offences committed.

Other ethnic groups could not stand the German attitude towards labour and paid dearly for it. The Maka, for example, were forced to work for government stations and were continually exposed to crimes which were committed by itinerant traders. Unable to bear the exploitation of their labour services, they staged a rebellion against the Germans for dehumanising them. This was an outcome of consultation between all chiefs. They desperately wanted to prevent their tormentors from persistently tormenting them (Stoecker 1986, 170). There was, however, arbitrary whipping inflicted on several indigenous populations on the order of officials, army officers and employers which went unrecorded and which were a common feature of daily life in Cameroon (Ibid). It was therefore not surprising that there were resistances in several instances from among different ethnic groups.

Due to notoriety of German plantations, Africans regarded them as a new form of slavery and on these plantations, labourers died like flies (Eckert 1998, 139; Rudin 1938, 317). To say the least, working conditions in commercial plantations set up by the Germans as seen by the indigenous population was near slavery (Epale 1985, 47-48). Force was the weapon to get labour for the coastal plantations and many died there. Their employers did not help matters because of their general harsh treatment of labour (Ibid., 50-51). Others braved deplorable working conditions and returned home after the expiration of their contracts while others ran away from plantations that needed them most (Rudin 1938, 317).

The trickery that was used by labour recruiters together with collaborators to get labour for plantations often led to deaths of some of them and stubborn workers were subjected to various forms of punishment. Several labour recruiters did not return from their recruitment trips. Private recruitment in general created many problems between recruiters and indigenous populations from where the labour was obtained. Private recruiters continued to receive support from more effective administrative networks even when this was regulated by the government (Clarence-Smith 1993, 209). Collaborators like Bali were accused of being directly involved in the supply of forced labour from their neighbours to work in the German plantations (Page et al. 2010, 353). In 1907, a European was killed because he held some women captive on the condition that their men should appear for recruitment (Rudin 1938, 325).

Unable to bear it any longer, the German government took over responsibility for regulating the recruitment of labour. Labour recruitment then became a public and no longer a private issue in 1913. The damage had been done because this was coming only at the tail end of the German administration of Cameroon. The government policy was that those who wanted to recruit workers paid a recruitment cost before they could embark on it (Richardson 1999, 144). For the workers who got fined or committed any other infractions, they suffered deductions of their wage (Ibid., 149) which was not good enough.

The rebellious local population was punished through military expeditions like the one at the Bamenda station in the western grassfields which lasted for fifteen years. These expeditions were either aimed at punishing ethnic groups that refused to supply labour, for ambushing patrols and killing soldiers or refusing to acknowledge German suzerainty in their area. In two expeditions mounted against the Bafut by German forces, over 1062 people died and 600 of them were taken prisoners or as penal labour (Nkwi 1989, 17). Through conscript labour, men had no other hope than to migrate down to the coast without their spouses or families. Matters were compounded when they were coerced into spending long periods away from these families (Njoh 2002, 411). This had an impact on family unity and care provision to older members of the family. The general use of forced labour by the Germans in their economic undertakings in Cameroon was strongly resented by the local population across the territory but to no avail (Ngho 1979).

German brutal treatment of labour made it possible to escape from the plantations, seek protection from missionaries and created general insecurity. The Basel Mission was particularly vocal about the treatment of labour in German plantations and the repressive measures in Buea which led to the widespread use of forced labour. The Mission on several occasions intervened on behalf of Cameroonians against excesses of colonial agents and labour recruiters (Gwanfogbe 1995, 63) and argued that plantation concessions regarded the local population as their private sources of labour (Ardener 1996, 162). The missionaries fought very hard for the humane treatment of labour. The privately owned coastal trading companies with plantations in the interior did not also want forced labour. This was not because of any genuine concern about labour but because their non-recruitment worked to their own advantage and to the detriment of planters who had plantations along the coast (Richardson 1999, 147-148). It is also important to note that missionaries made the local population believe that work and worship went together (Rudin 1938, 318). Due to government occasional recruitment, school pupils were forced into labour either for the regime or for the German plantations or compelled to work as porters to German traders in the hinterlands (Gwanfogbe 1995, 54).

Living conditions in the plantation camps, as well as the hot climate of the coastal region where most of these plantations were located had a negative effect on those who were recruited from the highlands that were colder. While a good number of them passed on, still many others never returned to their villages for several reasons (Ibid., 183), probably because they had been detribalised and got married to women from other ethnic groups especially those along the coastal region like the Duala, Bakoko, Balong, Mungo, Bassa and Bakweri. Due to the high death rate in the plantations as a result of the unhealthy climate, the government in 1896 passed an edict which stipulated that there was no private disciplining of workers. The government also required provision of medical attention for all workers and this proved to be costly to the planters in the territory (Bederman 1966, 354). The pay for labour was poor and their treatment bad. German executions were sometimes accompanied by vicious cruelty which often led to widespread resistance. For example between 1904 and 1907 there was armed resistance in many parts of southern Cameroon (Gann and Duignan 1977, 168). All these were a response to the brutish treatment of the people by the Germans. On the whole, plantations applied brutal and ineffective methods of labour procurement and management. Thousands of labourers paid for this arrogant blunder with their lives (Clarence-Smith 1993, 188).

Conclusion

In this paper we situated the country under study and presented the overall German policy in her colonial possessions in Africa which included Cameroon, German East Africa, German South West Africa and Togoland. The use of labour for various economic activities formed part of the German economic policy in these colonies. Labour was used by both government and private services and there was often competition for it between different stakeholders such as the planters and traders.

We have also examined early attempts to open up the hinterlands to the world global economy and this could not have been possible without the crucial role of labour as porters, railway and road workers among others. It was within the context of the importance of labour to the German colonial enterprise that this study was made relevant. In order to perceive or paint a picture of German labour conscription or present a generalisation, there was a need to review the concept of violence as examined within scholarly settings or by some scholars and to contextualise it within the German colonial period in Cameroon like elsewhere in Africa.

This paper has also examined the challenges of getting labour for the various economic interest groups in Cameroon. There was the use of coercion and violence with some traditional rulers acting as facilitators. This was especially so for those who were conscripted to work in the German commercial plantations established along the coastal belt of Cameroon. The last part of the paper was on an analysis of the consequences of labour conscription. There is therefore a need for lessons to be drawn from this for a better labour policy that honours rather than degrades labour.

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ABSTRACT

We have investigated German preference of coercion and violence in recruitment of labour in Cameroon. Cameroon's colonisation was facilitated by two German trading firms and economic motivations were central to this scheme. The establishment of several plantations triggered a gripping need for extra labour from the hinterlands for economic and administrative purposes. Its scarcity in the immediate vicinity occasioned supply from other areas and was facilitated by chiefs and labour recruiters. Chiefs signed labour contracts without consent from recruits. Some constructed or maintained roads and died in the process. This paper discusses these issues through a content analysis of accessible literature.

KEYWORDS:

Coercion. Violence. Conscription. Germany. Cameroon. Colonisation.

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