



# Child Trafficking Across the Cameroon/Nigeria Border: A Historical Perspective

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**Abstract:** This paper discusses the history and consequences of child trafficking across the Cameroon-Nigeria border. Clandestine trade in goods and services has a long history between Cameroon and Nigeria since the partition of the two countries by the Germans and the British in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Trafficking of children between these countries for various reasons was recorded in the colonial period. It continued after independence and intensified following the world economic recession of the mid-1980s. In spite of international condemnation and measures taken by both governments to combat this inhuman trade in children, it has continued with greater complexity with consequences for both countries. This paper analyzes and reinterprets existing literature on the subject to show that child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria has a long history. While it has benefitted those involved in it, it has debased the children involved and created other associated problems for the departing and receiving communities. Cameroon and Nigeria serve as countries of departure, destination and also as transit for children being trafficked to other parts of Africa, Europe, Asia, Middle East and Latin America.

**Keywords:** Child trafficking, Cameroon-Nigeria Border, Departure, Destination, Transit

## Introduction

The Cameroon-Nigeria border, a product of the partition of Africa in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is rich in cross-border socio-cultural and economic activities. These activities have their roots in the pre-colonial period and were facilitated by the cultural homogeneity of many of the border areas (Kah 2013: 26-34).

When Germany was defeated in the First World War of 1914-1916 and German

Kamerun eventually partitioned between Britain and France, British Cameroon was officially governed as an integral part of

the Federal Republic of Nigeria between 1922 and 1961. On 11 February 1961, the southern portion of British Cameroons, Southern Cameroons, voted for reunification with the Cameroun Republic which gained independence on 1 January 1960. The northern portion or Northern Cameroons voted for integration with Nigeria. Although British Cameroons was administered from Nigeria between 1922 and 1961, it remained first as a Mandated territory of the League of Nations and from 1945 as a Trust territory of the United Nations. Both countries share a border of over 1650 kilometres from the

sea to Lake Chad in the North. This long border has promoted several official and clandestine activities between citizens of these countries. Clandestine activities include smuggling, drug, prostitution and human trafficking (Niger-Thomas 2001: 43-70). Children were also trafficked from French Cameroon during the colonial period into Nigeria. Among the many people recorded in literature to have been trafficked in history are women and children. The complicity in the activity explains the difficulty in having exact numbers.

Movement between Cameroon and Nigeria including child trafficking was made possible by the cultural homogeneity of the border areas. The upper Cross River basin contains populations related to those found in the Ogoja and Calabar administrative units of Nigeria. Among other groups, the border splits the Ejagham, Boki, Korup and Efik speaking peoples in the south (Johnson 1970: 45). In the Northern part of the border the Hausa Fulani groups are found in Nigeria and Cameroon making communication easy between the two countries (Chem-Langhëë 2004). The similarity in cultural practices in many respects contributed to child trafficking between the two countries from the colonial period to contemporary times. Religion has also facilitated movement across the border of the two countries; Islam in the North and Christianity in the South. Through the Muslim travel to Mecca and other connections between Muslims and the Middle East, children have been trafficked in North Cameroon to countries of this region. In the South, the rising wave of Pentecostalism which exists between Cameroon and Nigeria has

contributed to the trafficking of children to and from both countries.

Trafficking in human beings especially women and children has become a very rewarding illegal economic activity only comparable to drug trafficking and arms smuggling all over the world. It is indeed one of the fastest growing criminal industries worldwide (Okojie 2009; Oarhe and Enabunene 2012: 62; Lawrance and Roberts 2012: 3). Trafficking is also linked to the history of Africa's involvement in the global trade in slaves where women and children were trafficked to the 'New World' to work in plantations. The trade affects all countries in Africa. Human trafficking is also linked to the introduction of new ideologies which included Islam and Christianity, colonialism and imperialism and also the imposition of the capitalist mode of production since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Lawrance and Roberts 2012: 1; Njoh and Ayuk-Etang 2012: 36). These new ideologies created an enabling environment for human trafficking in different ways. Child trafficking in particular has become so alarming that national governments of the world are concerned about it and have taken measures to end it (Adepoju 2005: 76).

In Nigeria in 2009 for example, the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons and Others Related Matters (NATIP) reported that 46% of Nigerian victims of transnational trafficking are children with the majority being girls trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation (Beyond Irregularities 2013). Considering the increasing rate of child trafficking human rights organisations, feminist activists and scholars have taken a great interest in it.

They are all concerned about its effects on the lives of women and youths and how this can be eradicated (Olaniyi 2009: 36). Child trafficking is one of the gravest violations of human rights in the world today and more often together with their families they are ensnared with empty promises of a better life, of an escape route from poverty. Annually, hundreds of thousands of children are smuggled across borders and sold as mere commodities. The statistics show that each year an estimated 1.2 million victims are trafficked with 32% of these coming from Africa (Child Trafficking in West Africa 2002; Oluwatoyin 2009: 81).

### **Relevance of Study**

The significance of this study is in the fact that child trafficking has attracted researchers; human rights groups, feminist activists and international organisations. These have in various ways condemned human trafficking in general and child trafficking in particular (Olaniyi 2009: 36). The human rights groups have taken interest in trafficking to restore dignity to the human person especially children trafficked and sold as mere commodities (Child Trafficking in West Africa 2002). It is inconceivable to think of people being bought and sold in the 21<sup>st</sup> century many years after the abolition of the South Atlantic System. This has led to awareness creation and activities in the North West Region of Cameroon for example to promote decent work. This was thanks to the initiative of the ILO and funded by the Dutch government. This mobilisation and awareness creation shows that child trafficking has become a monster to be destroyed. The interest of feminist groups in the incessant trafficking in women and children is to condemn all those who have exploited

their vulnerability to their own economic benefit. As they send many people to different parts of Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and today Latin America with Venezuela as a popular destination, they make a living for themselves by enslaving these people. The trafficked children suffer from various forms of abuse such as street hawking and prostitution.

Since human trafficking is one of the largest and fastest growing criminal industries worldwide, national governments and other humanitarian organisations need to invest more resources to end it. At the present, the personnel is limited, borders are porous and some government officials corrupt. Besides, many people in Africa live below the poverty line and if the ir governments do not create social welfare schemes to benefit them and if wealth is not re-distributed, the likelihood is that human trafficking will continue in greater intensity. The increase in the networks of human traffickers, the secrecy involved in their operations and the numerous agents who make this work has made human trafficking to remain a serious problem. Countries of departure, transit and destination in Africa and other parts of the world should tackle also internal trafficking through good governance and job creation and this will contribute towards stemming the tides of external trafficking.

This study is also significant in that the degree of human trafficking especially children warrants the teaching of human trafficking to kids in schools. This will enable them to grow to appreciate this evil practice and promote socialisation (Onuoha 2013: 61). Education will also

enlighten poor parents not to fall into the temptation of allowing their children to be taken on the promise of rewards. Many people in rural and urban areas through education will come to terms with the harsh reality of child trafficking. Apart from teaching kids and their parents about human trafficking, other forms of the social media should be used to pass on the message about the evil of trafficking in persons. These will include the radio and television. Human trafficking is a human rights abuse like other human rights abuses in the world. This must be brought to the knowledge of young people through education so that they can escape from the trappings of the traffickers when they come looking for their prey. Human trafficking has a history of its own.

### **Defining and Historicising Trafficking**

Trafficking comes from the early modern European term *traffick*. It was meant to engage in commerce, to transact, to buy and sell, and to negotiate or bargain for something whether this was a commodity or a relationship. This term had a derogatory sense in so far as one may participate in a transaction that was either not quite proper or conducted in secret. With the passage of time especially by the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the derogatory sense of the term *traffick* became more pronounced. The establishment of greater controls over the movements of goods and people in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, traffic increasingly connoted illegal transactions. In the context of legislative efforts to abolish the slave trade in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, continued trade in slaves became trafficking (Lawrance and Roberts 2012: 3).

Today, trafficking implies forcing persons into positions where they are exploited

though they may have originally agreed to voluntarily leave with the trafficker, or do so under conditions of deceit or fraud (Okojie 2009). According to Article 3 (a) of the Palermo Protocol and the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, Supplementary the UN Convention Against Organised Crime of 2000:

‘Trafficking in persons’ shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation...shall be irrelevant where any of the...[fore-mentioned] means...have been used.

The recruitment, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered ‘trafficking in persons,’ even if it does not involve ...[any of the above listed means].

“Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age (Cited in Child Trafficking in West Africa 2002: 1-2; Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006: 20).

The Protocol lists a number of things linked to trafficking of people all over the world. Emphasis is on threat and the use of force or coercion or deceit. The Protocol also talks about controlling someone for the purpose of exploitation. These and other unorthodox practices associated with the movement of people from one place to another have made trafficking of people a serious global concern. Trafficking of children include many as young as five years or less.

Nigeria ratified the UN Protocol in 2001. She also passed a national law against trafficking which was entitled “Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2003” and the Child Rights Act in 2003. This act deals comprehensively with the issue of child trafficking (Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006: 12). The ratification and enactment of other laws related to trafficking by the Nigerian government notwithstanding, trafficking of children and women within and outside the country including its neighbour Cameroon has continued unabated. This is due to the complex nature of the business which involves several agents and routes and also because of the lapses in government services fighting this inhuman activity. In Cameroon, the anti-trafficking law defines child trafficking as the act of moving or helping to move a child within or outside the country to reap financial or material benefit. This definition is in line with the Palermo Protocol because it condemns the transportation of children within or outside Cameroon for financial and material rewards. As discussed elsewhere in this paper, this is punishable by the Cameroon law although the practice continues due to the huge rewards

involved. The history of child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria began in the colonial period.

### **Child Trafficking in the Colonial Era**

Human trafficking took place between Cameroon and Nigeria in the colonial period. Among the people who were trafficked were women and children. Children were either trafficked to or from Nigeria or both countries serve as transit for children from other countries to other West African countries like the Gold Coast. The trafficking of children was made possible by the long border stretching from the sea to Lake Chad. There was and still is internal trafficking in countries of West and Central Africa like Côte d’Ivoire, Mali, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Togo, and Guinea (Combating the Trafficking 2001: 5; Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006; Ladan 2012; Onyejekwe 2005: 114).

The trafficking of children from either country took place in areas like the Cross River region in the south and other parts of the north. Many of the ethnic groups across the border like the Boki and Ejagham are culturally contiguous. Some were also part of the trading empire of the Sahara and the Atlantic Ocean for many years prior to colonial rule. Among the major border points where child trafficking took place were Seme, Maiduguri, Sokoto and Calabar (Ladan 2012). Socio-political and economic conditions contributed to make child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria a profitable venture. During the First World War child trafficking was extensively taking place between these neighbouring countries. Trafficking of children also flourished under British rule of the Mandated territory of Cameroon

and the colony of Nigeria. During the period from 1931 to 1935 the sale and trafficking of children was endemic in the Mandara region, home to the Wula ethnic group. This was sustained by the Wula habit to trade their female children to the Gowa and Ashigashiya under the guise of marriage for small sums. Many of the girls who were trafficked from North Cameroon were taken to the Sokoto Caliphate as concubines or wives (Aderinto 2007: 9). Apart from trafficking of children from the Wula ethnic group towards the Kanem Empire, some were destined for Wadai and Tibesti further north. Traffickers used hidden routes to escape from being caught and maltreated. One of such routes was from Mandara northwards through the western part of Dikwa, the north eastern corner of Bornu Province and along the shores of Lake Chad (Olaniyi 2009: 40-43). Children were also trafficked during the colonial period from Borno and Yobe in Nigeria to Chad and Cameroon. They were taken through Baga and Doron Baga borders of Borno State which was linked to Chad, Niger and Cameroon (Olaniyi 2009: 55).

There was also trafficking of children between Cameroon and Nigeria around the Cross River region. Children from the Cross River State of Nigeria were often trafficked to Cameroon, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea. This is likely due to the large number of Nigerians who resided in Southern Cameroons on secondment or as business men. At the border crossing at Ikom, many children were accompanied by adults as they made their way through Cameroon and elsewhere. In Cameroon they were forced to work in the farms during the farming season and to work with plantation owners (Ibid: 54). Calabar in South East

Nigeria served as a transit port for children who were and are still being sent to Gabon or Cameroon. Today it serves as an important port for the trafficking of children from Cameroon to Nigeria (Okojie 2009). From the colonial to the post-independence era, movement of trafficked children from Cameroon to Nigeria took place and from Nigeria to Cameroon. Some of the children eventually trafficked to Nigeria were on transit to the Gold Coast with a promising economy along the West African coast. It attracted many people from other Anglophone and Francophone of West Africa.

The importance of the Cross River to the trafficking of women and children was glaring. This was handled in correspondences between colonial officials in Nigeria and Cameroon. In one of such communications on 29 January 1942 concerning Mamfe Division, the District Officer for Mamfe Division acknowledged that women and child trafficking took place in the Banyang, Kembong, Takamanda and Boki areas. Again, in memo No. 796/38 of 14 July 1943 from the Secretary of the Eastern Provinces D.A.F. Shute to the Residents of Calabar, Cameroons, Ogoja, Onitsha and Owerri administrative units he decried child prostitution in Lagos as a result of the trafficking of young girls for prostitution. Most of these girls were about 12 years and among them were the Ibos, Efiks and Sobos.

Many people were indeed trafficked from Cameroon to Nigeria during the colonial period and among these were child prostitutes. They were taken to Lagos to serve as prostitutes in the streets and in the bars. The table below presents some

statistics of women and girls who were trafficked to Lagos, their ethnic origin and those who owned them. Some of them

came from different parts of British and French Cameroon.

**Table 1**  
**Prostitutes and Area of Origin Resident in Lagos 1943**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nationality</b>	<b>Quarter</b>	<b>House Owner</b>
Lydia Nwabang	Meta	Small Mamfe	Sam
Christian	Sofang	Small Mamfe	Jacob
Tabot	Tali	Small Mamfe	Ashu
Manyong	Asam	Small Mamfe	Oben
Ida	Bende	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Cicilia	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Christiana	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Ayuk	Esagam	Ojong Obi	Eta
Catherina	B. Akagwe	Ojong Obi	Ayuk
Alice	Boki	Ojong Obi	Simon
Frida Jato	Osing	Ojong Obi	Moses
Matherina	Nsamdrati	Ojong Obi	Peter
Mary	Okumi	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Catherine Enow	Nguti	Ojong Obi	Eno
Orock	Besong Abang	Ojong Obi	Achare
Ekun	Agbokem	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Eneji	Boki	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Christiana	Yaounde	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Eneji Ojake	Boki	Ojong Obi	Her Own
Ma Okon	Nsanarati	Ojong Obi	Taku
Agnes	Bejang	Ojong Obi	Eyong
Nje	Okumi	Ojong Obi	Kofi
Agnes	Out	Ikom	Tom
Nancy	Nde	Max	Max
Alice	Nde	Hausa	Jeremiah
Cicilia	Aja	Hausa	Vincent
Martha	Aja	Hausa	Vincent
Serah	Boki	Hausa	Vincent
Frida	Aja	Hausa	Simon
Bedsi	Nde	Hausa	Jacob
Serah	Boki	Hausa	Tachi
Serah	Bejang	Hausa	Sam
Elizabeth	Bejang	Hausa	Her Own
Alice	Bejang	Hausa	Her Own
Adija	Babuti	Hausa	Her Own
Paulimina	Yaounde	Yaounde	Michael
Amina	Babuti	Hausa	Serikimta

Teckler Nike	Akwen	Kofi	Her Own
Emilia	Nguti	Nkam Ude	Awodu
Satu	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Adija A.	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Adija C.	Bamum	Hausa	Her Own
Veronica	Babuti	Hausa	Egenatus
Marita	Sananga	Yaounde	Cecilia
Karana	Yalongo	Yaounde	Ma Masina
Alice	Mbendake	Hausa	Agbor
Mary	Jikali	Koffi	Alois
Awa	Jikali	Koffi	Alois
Veronica	Babunti	Koffi	Her Own
Milla Kepe	Nguti	Koffi	Sictor
Baka	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Nji Ndanji	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Adija	Bamum	Hausa	Etinda
Adija Juma	Hausa	Hausa	Yerima
Ngosi	Hausa	Hausa	Yerima
Mero	Hausa	Hausa	Abubaca
Satu	Hausa	Hausa	Awodu
Mary Mobi	Boki	Nkama Ude	Her Own
Maro Efa	Nsanakang	Nkama Ude	Her Own
Janny Miji	Balepe	Nkama	Agum
Lydia Asap	Nde	Nkama	Paka
Ayamba	Nkum	Alois	Alois
Alice Ayamba	Kajifu	Nkama	Her Own
Paulina Kenye	Babunti	Hausa	Ngwei
Ndambi	Takamanda	Small Mamfe	Her Own
Awandabi	AgboKom	Small Mamfe	Ndambi
Mary Ashu	Kibam	Small Mamfe	Ndambi
Dora Ewan	Okuni	Nkama	Beching
Paulina Kikia	Boki	Ikom	Albert
Cecilia Ewang	Okuni	Ikom	Albert
Cecilia Agam	Okuni	Ikom	Stephen Ayuk
Emilia Ashu	Besong Abang	Ikom	Andrew
Anna Eno	Nguti	Ikom	Dedonza
Martha Egbe	Osing	Ikom	Andrew
Serah Ika	Nchany	Nkama	Andrew
Jenny Gebi	Adon	Nkama	Her Own
Mary Eyo	Adon	Koffi	Her Own
Lily	Ikom	Hausa	Sama Tailor
Frida Mor	Boki	Hausa	Tachi
Elizabeth	Boki	Hausa	Albert
Agbwa	Ibo	Nkama	Nkama
Adama	Bamum	Hausa	Satu

Mary Arack	Keaka	Yaounde	Cosmas
Awa	Bamum	Hausa	Satu
Elizabeth Oga	Ikom	Hausa	Satu
Cecilia Akpa	Obuda	Hausa	Isa
Awa C.	Njukum	Hausa	Her Own
Aga	Njukum	Hausa	Her Own
Alice Ayank	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Fanny Nyam	Boki	Hausa	Her Own
Clara Ntui	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Veronica Ashu	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Janny	Boki	Hausa	Alake
Sara Ogar	Boki	Hausa	Salami
Jany	Ikom	Nkama	Her Own
Elizabeth Alega	Ikom	Nkama	Her Own
Emilia Ntui	Nsanarata	Nkama	Akama
Elizabeth Nka	Okuni	Nkama	Akama

**Source:** Sf (1943) 2, Child Prostitution in Lagos, National Archives Buea (NAB)

In this table are names of girls who were trafficked from Cameroon and were prostitutes in Lagos. Others provided labour services in commercial plantations, brothels, hotels and bars. Many of the names of the girls in the table came from villages around the Cross River region of Cameroon contiguous with other villages on the Nigerian side. Trafficking was certainly made relatively easy because British Cameroons was administered by Britain as a League of Nations Mandate and later on as a Trust Territory of the United Nations in association with the colony of Nigerian. The table also shows that girls were trafficked from French Cameroon which was governed by the French between 1922 and 1961. Between British Cameroons and French Cameroon there was an international boundary that regulated movement from either territory to the other but as already mentioned, this was not the case with British Cameroon and the Federation of Nigeria because of their joint administration.

A further reading of the table shows that the villages that were implicated in child trafficking to Lagos for prostitution were from different regions of Cameroon. Many of them came from villages in the Cross River region which included Okuni, Nsanarati, Boki, Keaka, Ossing, Besongabang, Agborkem, Kajifu, Otu, Assam, Takamanda, Nsanakang, Bachou Akagbe, Esagem and Tali. Some of the names of the villages are wrongly written but on the whole these villages represent the Banyang, Ejagham and Anyang ethnic groups. The Boki like the Ejagham straddle the Cameroon/Nigeria border and there are many more Boki villages in Nigeria than in Cameroon. Since the Cross River region is one of cultural similarity it becomes difficult to distinguish between the people who left villages in present day Cameroon to Lagos and those who left villages in Nigeria.

Apart from child trafficking from the Cross River basin to Lagos, these children were also trafficked other areas including

some from French Cameroon. They first crossed the international boundary between British and French Cameroon and were eventually taken to Lagos and other towns like Calabar. Among the places mentioned in French Cameroon where girls were trafficked to Lagos and other cities in Nigeria were Yaounde, Babuti, Bamum country, Sanaga and Hausa country. Some came from the present North West Region especially from Meta country and Jakiri in the Momo and Bui administrative regions. Networks were established involving many people that were able to beat the vigilance of the colonial security even across the boundary between French Cameroon and British Nigeria and the Cameroons. The trafficking of children from different purposes continued into the post-independence period between Cameroon and Nigeria. Both countries are part of the network of child trafficking in West/Central Africa, Southern Africa, Europe, the Middle East, Latin America and Asia.

### **Child Trafficking after Independence**

Child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria within the Central and West African sub-region has remained a recurrent activity since independence of these countries in 1960/61 and 1960 respectively. Various forms of trafficking are taking place and despite efforts made to stem the tide of this trade, it is increasingly difficult to handle the volume of the children trafficked spanning the entire West and Central African region with ripples effects on South Africa and other parts of the world. Children are trafficked into and out of both countries annually. The trafficking of children quickened after the economic quagmire of the mid-1980s and the

debilitating living conditions of the masses in both countries. This crisis also accentuated the trade which involves many other West African countries including Benin, Gabon, Ghana, Guinea, The Gambia, Togo, Niger and Cote d'Ivoire (Measures to Combat Trafficking 2006: 11; Borderline Slavery 2003: 1).

Cameroon and Nigeria are involved in human trafficking including children in a variety of ways. Both countries have a flourishing market in internal trafficking mostly from the rural to urban areas. There is also a continuation of trafficking in children between the two countries which began during the colonial period. Again, both countries are also part of a broader network of trafficking covering West/Central Africa and other parts of the world. Each of them sends out children through illegal means for different reasons not only to other African countries but increasingly towards the Middle East, Asia, Europe and South America. They also receive children from other countries of West and Central Africa like the Central African Republic (CAR), Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Togo, Chad, Niger, Ghana, Benin among others. It is this multifaceted participation in child trafficking that one should understand the illegal activity between these two countries. Since most children trafficking is done with or facilitated by women, it is difficult to divorce child from women trafficking. Some of the girls trafficked eventually grow to maturity as women and go about their business on their own.

Some Nigerians living in Cameroon have been involved in child trafficking from their states of origin in Nigeria to Cameroon where they are enslaved. In

one incident in 1989 Miximilia Okenukwe from the Ohaji Ogula Local Government Area of Imo State was caught involved in child trafficking. He had brought Ifeoma Onwebucher (10 years), Ngozi Nwafor (8years), and Iraka Agwonkwo (8years) to serve as domestic servants in Tiko, Cameroon under deplorable conditions. Mr Miximilia Okenukwe was engaged in trafficking children from Nigeria and selling them for between 40,000FCFA and 100,000FCFA in Cameroon. This trafficker in children from Imo State in Nigeria was nabbed by the police in Tiko on 13 March 1989 following a tip-off. He was found with letters of agreement for more slaves for which he had been given an advance payment. Although Mr Okenukwe claimed that the children were brought to Cameroon after discussion and permission of their parents, Ndubuisi Beatrice, the only literate of the children said that they were enticed away to Cameroon. This is one of the ways through which children are lured away from their parents never to be seen again. In an incident in Muea, Buea around September 2013, two children were lured away by a trafficker while playing. Through frantic efforts the parents got back one in Kumba on the way to Nigeria but the other one was never seen again. The three children in Tiko were liberated thanks to the Nigerian Union in Cameroon that made arrangements for their return (Ngala 1990: 15).

This is one out of the many children who are trafficked annually from different states of Nigeria to work as domestic servants or to do business with their masters. The Nigerian population in Cameroon is over 4 million and known for their business acumen. Some of those

who have invested heavily in Cameroon often return home to get young people to assist them. While some will bring mature people or children from their families to assist them, some have lured poor parents to give them their children with the intention of exploiting them. Those who have been unable to bear the brunt of their masters have escaped back to Nigeria. This was the case with one Ikoh who after one year of tedious labour under her mistress escaped back to Nigeria. She could not bear the pressure of serving as a babysitter, cook, cleaner and washerwoman at the same time with no pay (Ibid). It is worth noting that most of the women and children trafficked from Nigeria to Cameroon is for domestic service and to work in the plantations in the littoral of the country (Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006; Onyejekwe 2005:144; Sawadogo 2012; Okojie 2009).

The oil boom of the 1970s in Nigeria created opportunities for people to migrate within and out of the country. The result was exploitation, international trafficking in women and children for forced labour and prostitution (Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006: 22). People with an affluent lifestyle which was a result of the oil boom needed children to work in their homes. There also emerged leisure spots in oil producing areas which attracted people from all over West and Central Africa. Children from rural areas of Oyo, Osun and Ogun States in the South West; Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Bayelsa States in the South-South; Ebonyi and Imo in the South East; Benue, Niger and Kwara States in the Middle Belt and also from Cameroon were ferried to serve the needs of the activities that emerged because of the expansion of cities in Nigeria. Internal trafficking in Nigeria has

been towards Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Calabar and Port Harcourt (Ibid). Lagos also became a city of rituals where organ harvesting became common. Children were trafficked to serve this need of Lagos that has increased with the passage of time. Just as girl children are trafficked from some states of Nigeria to the big cities of the country, there is a similar phenomenon in Cameroon. Many of these girls are trafficked in the Anglophone areas to the Francophone cities of Yaounde and Douala where they are exploited as domestic servants, street vendors, prostitutes, as well as in child care. Due to their unfamiliarity with French it makes it easier for their employers to assert control over them.

Many children have been trafficked from Nigeria to Cameroon. While some are from Nigeria, others come through Nigeria on transit and eventually make their way to Cameroon. These children are usually trafficked with women. Some of the women and children trafficked to Cameroon and other African countries are from Togo and other West African countries like The Gambia, Gabon, Ghana, Niger and Benin (Oarhe and Enabunene 2012: 63-65; Measures to Combat Trafficking 2006: 11; Child Trafficking in West Africa 2002). Child trafficking became public news in September 2001 when a group of 68 children between 18 months and 18 years old were rescued from a ship off the coast of Cameroon and then returned to Togo (Lawrance and Roberts 2012: 1). The girl children from Nigeria and other West African countries to arrive Cameroon serve as domestic workers, prostitutes and the boys become scavengers, car washers, bus conductors, drug peddlars and farmers under difficult conditions. Both the girls

and boys are involved in head loading, community-based brass melting and other menial jobs (Ladan 2012). It has been reported that children coming from Nigeria, Chad and the CAR into Cameroon through trafficking were sometimes put under working conditions like 18 hours per day for 3000fcfa per month.

Apart from recorded child trafficking from or through Nigeria to Cameroon, there is also reported child trafficking from Cameroon to Nigeria. The North West Region of Cameroon is a major source of victims of child trafficking to other parts of Cameroon and to neighbouring countries especially Nigeria. It has been recorded that child trafficking in the North West Region of Cameroon is due among other factors to economic marginalisation of women as far as access to knowledge, technology; land, education and health are concerned. It is also because of state neglect and higher levels of poverty among the people. Some of the children trafficked from Cameroon to Nigeria for purposes of forced labour and commercial sexual exploitation are on transit from other countries. Cameroon acting as transit for child trafficking is part of the network of child trafficking which also involves Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of Congo, and the Central African Republic.

### **Trafficking of Children a Continuing Process**

In spite of the outrage and international condemnation of child trafficking as a whole and between Cameroon and Nigeria in the Central and West African regions, the practice has not subsided. The practice has continued with even greater intensity because of the benefit that

people reap from it. In a general sense trafficking takes many forms and has acquired shocking new dimensions with multiple stakeholders. There is an insufficient and limited or no trained personnel to handle it (Human Trafficking in Nigeria 2006; Aronowitz 2001: 164). Between Nigeria and other countries including Cameroon, there is a strong link involving different categories of actors and contacts at the source and destinations. Added to this is the absence of a clear legal framework, scarcity of trained police to investigate cases of trafficking, ignorance and complicity by parents, corruption of border officials and the open borders that make transnational movement intractable. This is complicated by the secretive, informal and ritualistic nature of the trafficking (Adepoju 2005: 83). There is also a limited capacity of Customs and Immigration agencies which make the border porous. Other factors responsible for continuous child trafficking include illiteracy, unemployment, poor living standards and a weakened extended family (Ladan 2009: 82).

The law on child trafficking in Cameroon notwithstanding, the rewards of this trade are enough to pay for the punishment meted out. Anyone caught in the act of child trafficking is slammed a prison sentence of 10-20 years and the payment of a court fine of 50,000-100,000fcfa. If the victim is below 15 years it is 15-20 years and a fine of 100,000fcfa. In spite of this law deterring people from indulging in child trafficking, the traffickers have continued in the business because they can afford to pay the fine or buy their way when arrested.

Another factor that makes it difficult to end trafficking of children between Cameroon and Nigeria is the history of cross-border migration and the close links between communities on either side of the border. This has made control of the border a technical impossibility (Child Trafficking in West Africa 2002: 15). The vastness of the border between Cameroon and Nigeria is difficult to monitor which makes it difficult to control the children who are trafficked from Nigeria to Cameroon and from Cameroon to Nigeria. Since pre-colonial times, there has been movement of people in this border area and the partition of these people by the British and the Germans did not stop migration across the border. From the south to the north, different ethnic groups that straddle the border and the rate of illegal activities makes it easy for traffickers to go through the porous borders with ease. Some of the border officials are so corrupt that they join the traffickers to make their own money.

It has also been difficult to handle child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria because both countries do not only act as a destination but also a transit for children from other countries on their way to other African countries, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America (Combating the Trafficking of Children 2001: 5; Ladan 2012). Children on transit from Calabar are trafficked to Cameroon or Gabon and others on transit from Cameroon are trafficked to Nigeria and from there to other countries (Okojie 2009). Some of these children on transit in Cameroon go to Nigeria, Benin, Niger, Chad, Togo, the Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. Still others are sent to Algeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Morocco, Belgium, France, Spain,

China, Japan and Saudi Arabia (Onyejekwe 2005: 144; Oarhe and Enabunene 2012: 63).

### **Concluding Comments**

In this study, we have attempted a historical examination of child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria from the colonial period to contemporary times. There was first of all an examination of the phenomenon of human trafficking considering its persistence in the world today. This was followed by a discussion on child and women trafficking which is more frequent than other forms of trafficking and involves several continents of the world. The historical origin of this obnoxious practice has also highlighted. In this paper we have also discussed the significance of this study to contemporary realities in the world and how this could inform options in many countries. Although protocols and other laws have been enacted to deter people from participating in child trafficking, child trafficking remains a severe human rights issue in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Child trafficking between Cameroon and Nigeria has been an issue since the colonial period. While during the colonial period this was orchestrated mainly for prostitution, domestic service and other street activities, trafficking after independence has become a full time business of those involved to the extent that they risk being caught but will not give up the practice. Traffickers have taken children to and from Nigeria and Cameroon to work in plantations, brothels, hotels and to perform domestic chores. The sale of children's body parts is very common today especially in big cities like Lagos in Nigeria. The increase in trafficking between Cameroon and

Nigeria has also been made possible by complex networks where girls are recruited and they go through these countries on transit to Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America for prostitution. Internal child trafficking has also increased within Cameroon and Nigeria from the rural areas to big cities where the children are made to work under very deplorable or inhuman conditions.

This study ended with a justification of why child trafficking has not abated in spite all international conventions and protocols against it. It is indeed a way of life and an industry involving so many people some of whom should have rather fought against it. The investment of capital through activities like plantations, mines and other big business in the global South from the global North explain the reason for the trafficking of children to work in such businesses. Besides, the leisure industry in Europe, Asia and the Middle East to the extent that young girls are needed from countries like Cameroon and Nigeria to keep the industry booming. They are trafficked through Cameroon and Nigeria so that they can become sex workers in some of these areas. The money and bribery involved has succeeded to corrupt officials who should fight against it in the supplying countries like Cameroon and Nigeria. It would be important for an enabling economic environment to be put in place in these two and other countries of West and Central the chief supplying regions and most of them economically weak. Education will also cushion the effects of this trade which is a great income earner for those involved in it.

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