

Christian Teachings and Women's Militant Comportment in the Tole Tea Estate in Cameroon

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Abstract

During the colonial period, plantation authorities in Cameroon, like elsewhere in Africa and Asia, depended on male labour and showed little or no interest in the recruitment of female labour. Over time, the incessant shortage and unstable nature of the labour force led them to reconsider the permanent engagement of women as was the case of the Tole Tea Estate. The plantation hierarchy believed rightly or wrongly that women would be docile and therefore, would not agitate against the exploitative plantation policies as opposed to their male counterparts. This was however, a gruesome miscalculation as the women soon developed a "militant" behaviour that even surmounted that of male workers in the plantation milieu. The nature of their comportment and the manner in which they agitated for the amelioration of their working condition was sharpened by their affiliation to some Christian domination in the Tole vicinity. As such, with the help of a random survey carried out among 150 women in 2016 and with the use of a historical approach guided by both primary and secondary sources, this work argues that some Christian teachings acted as an eye opener to the women in knowing and claiming their rights. It further contends that some of the protests that the women staged against the plantation management could be attributed to their accumulated knowledge and behaviour imbued with religious feelings and actions as portrayed in protest songs, placards and other related aspects. The paper concludes that the Christian background of the women was therefore, a vehicle for dismembering the obnoxious plantation policies and forcing the authorities to act in their favour.

Keywords: Christian teachings, Comportment, Militant, Tole Tea Estate, Women.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1946 some of the former German plantations that were in the Southern Cameroons were revamped and indigenized by the British authorities leading to the creation of the Cameroon Development Corporation which became operational in 1947. The tea plantation at Tole was incorporated in the CDC ventures in 1954. In 1958, management took the decision to employ women on permanent basis in an attempt to put an end to the instability in male labour supply on its plantations. Though the primary motivation was the stabilization of the labour force, it was also believed that the women would be submissive or quiet in the labour process. Unfortunately, the expected women's docility and servitude on the Tole and other plantations soon turned into a mindboggling nightmare. The women, like their male counterparts in other plantations, organised a number of strike actions over the years as a disapproval of what they considered

as the exploitative tendencies of their labour. It was realized that their Christian background and their membership in some of the churches around the plantation were often reflected in the mode of their struggle. Most of them either worshipped in the Regina Pacis Catholic Church in Small Soppo, the Baptist Church Buiyuku or the Presbyterian Church Buiyuku.

BRIEF APPRAISAL OF LITERATURE

Although some literature exists on female labour in the tea sector of the CDC, considerable attention has not been given to the influence of Christian denominations on the mode of female militancy. Scholars who have written on the CDC plantations in general and the Tole Tea Estate in particular are wrapped up in other concerns namely, the sources of labour, the organization of work and the rewards to labour. We would however, attempt a brief review of some of the sources that discuss issues related

to the plantation life in an effort to set the discourse in its proper historical context.

Bederman [1] and Epale [2] raise a number of fundamental issues related to plantation systems in the former Southern Cameroons. While Bederman focuses on labour on the tea plantation at Tole, Epale gives a global picture of the origins of the plantations and labour at the coast. Their works are neither on gender mainstreaming nor on female resistance and compartment. Another issue that has attracted the attention of writers is the status of women in the domain of wage labour. Boserup [3] and Rodney [4] approximate the division of labour between men and women questioning the types of jobs that were said to be more productive than others. They blame colonialism for the loss of status and the subordination of women in the labour process in Africa. Unlike Boserup, Rodney is not confident that even the education and training given to women would bridge the gap between men's work (superior) and women's work (inferior). On their part, Kanji, Tan and Toulmin [5] argue against Boserup's model that the engagement of women in wage labour would lead to poverty alleviation and prosperity. Instead, they see a steady growth of the inequalities in income and assets between men and women.

Some scholars have preoccupied themselves with female labour and management relations in the plantation sector. Kurian [6] and Reddock and Jane [7] maintain that in plantation systems in Africa and Asia women work under appalling conditions with insignificant remuneration which they qualify as wage slavery. Though their works provide the basis from which the indicators of female discontent could be analyzed, they do not focus on the denominational

influence on the expression of their grievances in the labour process.

Konings [8] addresses one of the most contentious issues in African labour studies. That is, the debate engineered by scholars like Kurian [9] and Reddock and Jane [10] that female workers are generally less conscious and docile to their exploitation in plantation regimes. Konings uses the case of the Tole Tea Estate to argue that female workers were proactive and used various resistance mechanisms to force the CDC authorities to improve their lot. This paper attempts to establish the link between the piousness of the women and their militant comportment in the plantation milieu.

Women Status and Religious Background

Gender roles and stereotypes exist in every society and each of them has norms and patterns of behaviour that they ascribe to males and females. Female workers of the Tole Tea Estate played some distinguished roles in the plantation environment. Most of them were of Grassfields origins Edward Ardener, an anthropologist who carried out various researches on the CDC plantations, contains that groups such as the Aghem, Bafut, Ngie and the Menemo were from an area where the economic life was almost entirely based on subsistence agriculture with comparatively little trading activity. As a result, the need for an improvement in life brought about the desire to engage in the plantation money economic at the coast of Cameroon [11].

And sought employment against the wishes of their husbands or male relations who believed that wage labour was the reserve of men. Others however, allowed women to do so because their engagement was seen as an opportunity to augment their family income. In spite of this, their position in the society was that of housewives and therefore, they also played the role that went with motherhood [12]. Some of the coastal women

¹ Sanford H. Bederman, November/December 1967, "The Tole Tea Estate in West Cameroon," *Tijdschrift Voor Econ*

. *En.Soc.* No. 58,

² Epale S.J., *Plantation and Development in West Cameroon, 1885 -1975: A Study in Agrarian Capitalism*, New York, Vantage Press, 1985.

³ Boserup, E., 1970, *Women's Role in Economic Development*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd.

⁴ Rodney, W., 1972, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle L'Ouverture.

⁵ Kanji, N., S. F. Tan and C. Toulmin, 2007, *Women's Role in Economic Development, Ester Boserup : New Introduction*, London, Cromwell Press

⁶ Kurian, R., 1982, *Women Workers in the Sri Lanka Plantation Sector, A Historical and Contemporary Analysis*, Geneva, International Labour Organization

⁷ Reddock, R. and S. Jain, 1998, *Plantation Women: An Introduction*, in Reddock and Jain (eds.), *Women Plantation Workers, International Experiences*, Oxford and New York, Oxford International Publishers.

⁸ Konings, P., 1993, *Labour Resistance in Cameroon: Managerial Strategies and Labour Resistance in Agro Industrial Plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation*, London, James Currey; Konings, P., 1995, *Gender and Class in the Tea Estates of Cameroon*. Leiden, Africa Studies Centre.

⁹ Kurian, R., 1982, *Women Workers in the Sri Lanka Plantation Sector*

¹⁰ Reddock and Jain, *Plantation Women*

¹¹ E. Ardener, *The Sources of Labour Supply*, in Adener E., Adener S. and Warmington W. (Eds.) *Plantation and Village in the Cameroons. Some Economic and Social Studies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1960.

¹² Interview with Rose Mei, about 73 years, retired tea plucker, Buiyuku Village, 22 August 2016. She was a plucker in the estate from 1966-1996; interview with Martha Bah, about 67 years, retired Senior Accountant Tole Tea Estate, Buiyuku Village, 22 August 2016.

among who were indigenous Bakweri played ultimately the same role as their Grassfields counterparts though equally undermined by men [13]. Newland argues that women who did not work outside the household but rather performed household chores (“breeder-feeder” role) were dismissed by statisticians as “not economically active” but which was unfortunate and discriminatory [14].

Many women moved to seek employment at Tole when they were already above the age of 20. Some of them were either divorcees or were widows who suffered maltreatment in the hands their husbands or in-laws. There were also some spinsters who felt mature enough to shun male domination back at home to seek their economic independence. Given their maturity, they developed a sense of cohesion and reason to decry what they believed was the non-recognition of their efforts in the production process [15].

Besides, their religious background only came in to figure and fortify the way they were going to express their disapproval of their situation. In August 2016 we carried out a random survey among 150 female ex-workers of the Tole Tea Estate in an attempt to know their level of affiliation to Christian denominations and to find out how this connection was reflected in their militant attitude in the estate (see table 1). After retirement, many of them settled in surrounding villages such as Small Soppo, Bokwaongo, Buiyuku, Tole Weeding and Wotutu and continued worshipping in churches in Soppo and Buiyuku.

Referring to table 1, there were three main denominations that the women congregated with. A majority of them were Catholic Christians who worshiped in the Regina Pacis Catholic Church in Small Soppo with a numerical strength of 72 which comprised 48% of women with a Christian background. There were 41 women who worshiped in the Presbyterian Church Buiyuku giving a representation of 27.3%. Meanwhile, 25 of the women were members of the Baptist Church Buiyuku and comprised 16.7% of the entire Christian community. Lastly, 12 women, who constituted only 08% of the population, did not belong to any of the churches.

The Regina Pacis Catholic Church in Small Soppo situated at the beginning of the estate facing a vast portion of the plantation (see photograph 1) like the Baptist and Presbyterian churches in Buiyuku located close to the Tole Old camp and Tole Weeding were points of worship for women working in the plantation. Besides, the premises of Saint Mary Catholic Primary School Sasse, where both masses and prayer sessions were held weekly, were also situated in the heart of the plantation. The women were therefore surrounded by a number of churches which contributed in adding to their existing sense of awareness and the physical disapprobation of the odds of the African patriarchal systems.

Table-1: Denominational Membership of Female Workers

Affiliation	Place of Worship	No. of Women	percentage
Catholic	Small Soppo Cathedral	72	48
Presbyterian	Buiyuku	41	27.3
Baptist	Buiyuku	25	16.7
None	-	12	08
TOTAL	-	150	100

Source: Compiled from survey questionnaires in August 2016.

¹³Interview with Sarah Mojoko, about 75 years, retired tea plucker, Bokwaongo Village, 21 August 2016. She was a plucker in the estate from 1972-2002.

¹⁴Newland, K., 1979, *The Sisterhood of Man: The Impact of Women’s Changing Roles on Social and Economic Life Around the World*, New York, W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 1979, 132-133.

¹⁵Interview with Sarah Mojoko.



Photograph-1: A Cross Section of Tea Estate Showing Catholic Church in the Background

Source: Snapped by Damian Akara, Small Soppo, Buea, 23 August 2019. It is important to note that across the tarred road (partially seen in the picture) and directly opposite the church lies a vast portion of the tea plantation. The tea factory and camp houses are about 2,500m from the church southward.

The Interplay of Christian Gesticulation in Female Militant Actions

Over the years, the Tole Tea Estate witnessed sporadic disorders by the female dominated labour force. Though the CDC authorities were discomfited by the purported “bad behaviour” of the women, it was not the first time that women used force to ascertain their position in society. In some parts of Africa, women have often demonstrated an aptitude for the protection of their rights. In southern Nigeria, the women of Aba revolted in 1929 because the British authorities attempted to extend the capitation tax to them. In the Grassfields of Cameroon where most of the tea pluckers originated, two groups had distinguished themselves in challenging male chauvinism. The first was the *Anlu*, a female indigenous lodge in the Kom chiefdom which set out to seek redress for faults committed against women without the influence of any “western” institution. In 1958 this group came to the political scene when it resisted the agricultural laws by the Endeley government against contour farming [16]. There was also the *Fuenbuen*, a women’s traditional society in Kedjum keku and Ngemba fondoms which had basically the same features and objectives as the *Anlu* [17]. Drawing from this, it could be argued that it

was not a “western” institution, in this case the church, that inculcated the spirit of militant behavior in the women of Tole, but it only helped in influencing partly, the manner or mode in which their discontent was expressed. As such, it will be an exaggeration to claim that the church was an instrument of their radicalization.

Between July 11 and 12 1963 the workers of Tole Tea Estate went on a sit-down strike calling for an end to excessive task work and the pro-rata system of payment. The women complained that the 26kg (minimum harvest) of tea leaves they were expected to pluck daily was difficult to attain. Moreover, they decried the low wages and wage discrimination between the women and their male counterparts [18]. For example, a female worker engaged in general labour, with the same job description, earned a daily wage of FCFA 118 as opposed to her male counterpart who earned FCFA 135 [19].

During the two-day strike, over 100 women converged on the estate football field, about 500 metres from the tea factory, with tools such as plucking

¹⁶ S. Y. Awasom, *A Critical Survey of the Resuscitation, Activation, and Adaptation of Traditional African Female Political Institutions to the Exigencies of Modern Politics in the 1990s: The Case of the Takumbeng Female Society in Cameroon*, Paper presented at the CODESRIA 10th General Assembly, Kampala, Uganda, 8-12 December 2002, p.4.; W. G. Nkwi., *The Anlu Factor and the 1959 Elections in the British Southern Cameroons: The case of Kom Fondom, 1958-1961*, Buea, *Epasa Moto* Vol. 1, No. 6, March 2003, p. 155.

¹⁷ H. K. Kah, *The Cutlass my Husband, the Hoe my Wife: Women and Economic Development Among the*

Laimbwe of North West Cameroon in Contemporary Times, Maroua, *KALIAO*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 2011, pp. 5-9.

¹⁸ D. T. Akara, 2006, *Plantation Agriculture in the Former British Southern Cameroons: Female Labour on the Tole Tea Estate, 1958-2002*, M. A. Dissertation, University of Buea, 2006, p.99; D. T. Akara, 2013, *Rethinking Female Docility in Plantation Labour Systems in Africa: Female Labour and Management Fracas in the Tole Tea Estate in Cameroon, 1963-1992*, *Journal of the Society of Common Wealth Scholars in Research and Sustainable Development*, No. 5, Vol. 5, Kumasi, Wesley G. House, 2013, 216.

¹⁹Personnel Circular No. 5, Rates of Pay-Daily Rated Employees, CDC Personnel Division, Bota, 1963.

baskets, hoes and machetes but refused to go to work and stayed there till closing time [20]. Some of their male counterparts who faced similar problems joined the women. Oscar Ngwamesia, a former worker of the estate, who participated in the strike recalled that some of the workers were clad with plantain leaves and yellow rain coats around their waists. Others carried tea branches and palm fronds. They sang religious songs, which for the most part had been learnt in church, calling on God to intervene in their suffering. They raised their voices intermittently making sarcastic statements and alterations in nomenclature connected with Biblical inclined parlances such as “Bana-Banana, Satan the Devil, Na God Go Pay You,” and “Bana Must Go [21].” Lawrence Bana was a Senior Overseer in the estate whom the women accused of wickedness and highhandedness [22]. The women went further to express their frustration and disapproval of Bana by disparagingly referring to him as “Barabbas the criminal,” in consonance with the Biblical Barabbas [23].

Between January and April 1976, a wave of strike actions occurred in a number of CDC plantations such as Mondoni and Bota with the support of the workers’ union provoked by increase in tasks and unpaid bonuses. On 6 April 1976 the CDC authorities held a meeting with representatives of the workers’ union and the palm harvesters where it was agreed that the grievances of the workers would be resolved [24]. The workers later realized that the CDC hierarchy showed a lack of commitment to completely address the issues.

²⁰D. T. Akara, *Female Strike Actions in the Tole Tea Estate of the Cameroon Development Corporation, 1963-1993: A Historical Analysis*, PhD Thesis, University of Maroua, 2016, p. 266.

²¹ Interview with Oscar Ngwamesia, 73 years, retired Junior Field Assistant Tole Tea Estate, Wotutu Village, 18 August 2014.

²²Akara, PhD Thesis, 262

²³Barabbas was a notorious criminal cited in the passion of Christ whom Pontius Pilate freed at the Passover. He was convicted for murder, insurrection and other heinous crimes. All the four gospel writers, Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, make reference to him in their writings and teachings. For example, in Mathew 27: 15-26, it is said that during the feast, it was the tradition that the Governor would release a prisoner of the people’s choice. He asked the people to choose whom to be set free between Jesus Christ and Barabbas and the multitude chose the latter and asked that Christ be crucified. Even Pilate’s wife could not convince him to free the son of God.

²⁴ P. Konings, *Labour Resistance in Cameroon: Managerial Strategies and Labour Resistance in Agro-Industrial Plantations of the Cameroon Development Corporation*, London, James Currey, 1993, 151.

Between 16 and 20 June 1976, the female workers of the Tole Tea Estate led a sympathy strike action in support of the other estates for similar reasons. In the morning of 18 June 1976, for example, several field workers gathered at the Tole football field. They all appeared in their working attire and tools, but resolved not to go to work until they had a concrete sign from the trade union authorities to do so [25]. They sang several religious songs of distress. For instance, Rose Mei, a former tea plucker, who participated in the strike action, recalled vividly the lyrics of the song “Pa-pa put me down, pa-pa I don tire, I don carry some heavy cargo-o, pa-pa God ooooh put me down...”[26]. This song in Pidgin English, called on God almighty to relief the women who were tired of carrying a hefty task burden. Suffice it to say that the biblical origin of this song could be traced to the book of Matthew chapter 11, verses 28-30 (New Testament). These verses depict Christ calling on us in moments of suffering saying that “come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads and I will give you rest... and the load I will put on you is light”[27].

Mola Njie, a trader and resident of Buiyuku who sold bread every morning to the striking women acknowledged that they sat in the football field singing both biblical and military songs. That the women called for the removal of Eloundou Assama, the Senior Field Assistant who was Acting Estate Manager at the time, whom they accused of being the brain behind the non-payment of gratuities. Amidst the rowdiness, the workers held placards with inscriptions such as “Eloundou Must Go,” “Judas Iscariot,” “Pay Our Dues,” “We Are Not Slaves”[28]. It is worth recollecting that Judas’ betrayal of Jesus is recounted in the book of Matthew 26:48, Mark 14:44 and Luke 22:47. In reaction, Eloundou regretted that most of the women who were illiterates were easily manipulated by unknown persons for their own selfish interests [29]. The forces of law and order were called in for surveillance while management and the Labour authorities tried to resolve the issue. They were other strike actions that occurred in 1977, 1978, 1988 and 1992. Like the previous ones, they were characterized

²⁵ Interview with Sarah Mojoko; interview with Rose Mei.

²⁶ Interview with Rose Mei.

²⁷ [], *The Book of Matthew, Good News Bible*, Second Edition, Brazil, United Bible Societies, 1994, pp. 814-815.

²⁸ It is worth noting that some of the placards, be it in English or Pidgin English, were written by the children or relations of the workers who were either pupils or students. They were however, written in consonant with the wishes of the women.

²⁹D. T. Akara, *Female Strike Actions in the Tole tea Estate of the Cameroon Development Corporation, 1963-1992: A Historical Analysis*, PhD Thesis, University of Maroua, 2016, pp. 281-282.

by religious songs, inscriptions on placards among others. Unlike previous disorders, the 1988 strike action, for example, it went beyond the precincts of the Tole plantation milieu as it became a public demonstration. Ceberia Chi [30] (see photograph 2) and other women who led the strike action, portrayed some elements of their Christian upbringing in relation to the mode in which it was conducted.



Photograph-2: Portrait of Ceberia Chi

Source: Chi's family album, Small Soppo, Buea, 5 January 2013.

On 3 October 1988 a wild-cat strike action broke out following the women's inability to cope with the increase in tasks as the minimum amount of tea they were expected to harvest had increased from 26kg to 32kg. The CDC authorities claimed that this decision was an attempt to fight the scourging economic crisis that griped the country and which affected the plantation sector. Maurice Chifor Nchanji, the Estate Manager, in a report to the General Manager of the

CDC indicated that the strike involved some 469 [31] pluckers. He further maintained that these women grouped themselves and marched to the Labour office in Buea in disapproval of the increase in their tasks [32]. Amongst the ring leaders was Ceberia Chi whose upbringing and Christian background helped in depicting her conduct and prowess as a women's leader who for the most part advocated a less violent but firm approach in clamouring for improved conditions on the plantation.

On the morning of 3 October 1988, the women who refused to go to the field, gathered in front of the tea factory carrying placards with statements inscribed in bold letters in the English Language and in Pidgin English such as "THE LORD IS OUR SHEPHERD," "WE SAY NO TO SLAVE LABOUR," "PRO-RATA PAY MUST STOP." And "COW WEY NO GET TAIL NA GOD DI DRIVAAM FLIES." [33] They also sang songs with biblical pedigrees which had served as freedom and reassuring tunes (Negro Spirituals as they were called) among the black slaves in the American plantations during the slave era. Some of the songs were at times modified to suit the women's condition, purpose and the message(s) they planned to put across to their employer. An example was "Go Down, Moses," that expressed the misery in which African American slaves found themselves and yearned for freedom. The song originates from the Old Testament story of the captivity of Israelites in Egypt (as seen in Exodus chapter 3, verses 1-22) whose incarceration was likened to the female condition in Tole. It is imperative to present the original lyrics of this song and then show how the women of the Tole gave it an artistic remix to suit their objective. Here is the original song:

Go Down, Moses

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
Let my people go!
Oppress'd so hard dey could not stand,

³⁰ Ceberia Chi Njong was born in about 1945 in Njinikom. Her father, a polygamist, did not have interest in sending his children to school, particularly the girls whom he preferred to marry off. He also developed aversion for the Roman Catholic Mission because he saw it as a ploy to destroy the people's customs in Kom. She got married to Maurice Menue Ngong of Kom origin in February 1962 at Oku. Both settled in Tombel for a while before finding employment in the Tole Tea Estate. Later, her husband found another job as a cook and driver at the reverend fathers' house and the Bishop Rogan College, a minor seminary in Small Soppo. Both of them became devoted Christians and blessed their marriage in church. Chi, however, kept her job as a tea plucker (later Headwoman) in Tole until her retirement in 2000. Chi joined the Catholic Women's Association (CWA) which has as part of its mission, the promotion of the spiritual growth of women and their emancipation. Here she had the opportunity to fellowship with other women who belonged to various religious groups.

³¹ It is important to note that this figure is bigger than the sample size of 150 women because it was difficult to get more than this number given that this research was carried out in 2016, long after the Tole plantation had been privatized and at a time when many of the women who witnessed or participated in the various strike actions mentioned were already retired and no longer within the plantation surrounding or death. That notwithstanding, the 150 women were carefully selected making sure that they lived some of the experience recounted in this study.

³² CDCAB, No. 20, Disputes EM Tole, 26/07/79-28/12/99, Maurice Chifor Nchanji, EM Tole Tea Estate, Letter/Report to the GM on the 1988 Strike Action, 5 October 1988, pp. 218-219.

³³ Interview with Rose Mei, about 73 years, retired tea plucker, Buiyuku Village, 22 August 2016.

Let my people go!

Chorus

Go down Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land.
Tel ole Pha-raoh,
Let my people go!
Thus say de Lord, bold Moses said,
Let my people go!
If not I'll smite your first-born dead,
Let my people go!

No more shall dey in bondage toil,
Let my people go!
Let dem come out wid Egypt's spoil,
Let my people go [34]!

The women of Tole, most of whom were Christians and in spite of their illiteracy were aware of some of the biblical teachings and stories following church sermons, doctrine classes and meetings. They compared their condition at Tole to that of the Israelites in Egypt who were treated as slaves. Ceberia Chi and her colleagues modified this song to suit the context of the strike action in 1988. The altered version of "Go down Moses" was sung in Pidgin English as follows:

*When woman dem suffer for Tole Tea,
Leave ma people go!
When woman dem work no rest,
Leave ma people go!*

Chorus

*Oh! go down, go down!
Go down for To-le, go tell EM,
EM leave ma people go³⁵!*

The implication of this song was that the female workers wanted the CDC authorities to know that they were treated like slaves or people who were held in captivity but who were resolute in their desire for freedom as was the case with the Israelites in Egypt. This was among the songs the women sang as they marched to the Labour Office in Buea, carrying their plucking baskets and their "plucking wand (metres) along covering a distance of about 3 kilometres from the tea factory at Tole. The aim was to lead the general public know their plight and probably sympathize with them while at the same time they wanted to mount pressure on the labour authorities to go tell the Estate

³⁴ C. Berkin, Alan B., Clayborne C., Robert W. C., Robert A. D., Eric F., Jeffrey B. M., Arthur W. and Leonard W., *A History of the United States, 1865 to the Present: American Voices*, Glenview, Illinois, Scott Foresman and Company 1992, p. 131.

³⁵ D. T. Akara, *Female Strike Actions in the Tole tea Estate of the Cameroon Development Corporation, 1963-1992: A Historical Analysis*, PhD Thesis, University of Maroua, 2016, pp. 308-309.

Manager to relieve them of tasks overload. Transport circulation on the road was made difficult and the demonstration became a public spectacle. With this song, they were able to force E.K. Lottin, the Provincial Delegate of Labour for the South West Province, out of his office. The prevailing circumstance obliged him to join the women and to go on foot with them back to Tole in order to seek a lasting solution to the problem [36].

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to demonstrate how the Christian background of a group of plantation women was reflected in their militant comportment in times of conflict with the plantation management. It was realized that some ways through which the interplay of the said features could be made perceptible or evident was through biblical and other related statements on placards and verbal expressions which they used to vent their exasperation with managerial policies. In addition, the use of songs that were of biblical origins, as was the case of "Go down Moses," is further testimony of their connection with the church. As argued however, the Christian background reverberated in the expression of the discontent of the women did not mean that their awareness against societal injustice and consequent militant comportment was thanks to the church and other "western" institutions. These already existed in the traditional society as justified by examples of resistant movements such as the *Anlu* and *Fuenbuen*. Therefore, the women's encounter with the church only enabled them use religious symbols to give a new twist to their protests. Given that the churches did not instruct the women to wage a war against management, the manifestation of church-oriented symbols in the conflict that pitted labour against management was not calculated but was rather coincidental.

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³⁶ *Ibid.*, 311.

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