

**GEOPOLITICS OF COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES  
ON THE CAMEROONIAN COASTS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT  
OF A PRECARIOUS MECHANISM OF CUSTOMS SERVICES  
BY THE GERMAN COLONIAL ORDER: (1884-1916)**

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***Abstract***

The notion of customs is not foreign to African civilization. Long before Western penetration on the Cameroonian coasts, traditional societies practiced it there according to their socio-cultural and economic considerations. Struck by the natural wealth that was exposed by the pre-colonial coastal peoples on the trading posts, this very quickly aroused the race and the greed of the European powers on the Cameroonian coasts. Portuguese, Dutch, English, Spanish, French and Germans clashed over their economic interests on the Cameroonian coasts. It is in this perspective that Germany, which annexed Kamerun on July 12, 1884, quickly set up a customs service. Because she knew that customs regulated trade and was considered one of the real catalysts of modern economies in this sense, it is thanks to it that a country can ensure its commercial development as well as the protection of its industries in times of crisis. From primary, secondary and iconographic sources, our reflection will show how the German colonial machine had set up a customs service not to develop their new colony but rather to exploit it economically.

**Key words:** *Customs - colonial order - Germany - Cameroonian coasts - rivalries of economic interests - colonial powers.*

**Introduction**

The interest of taxing goods entering or leaving a territory was perceived very early on by States. In pharaonic Egypt, the conquered states were forced to pay a tribute which was mainly made up of cattle, gold and various other precious objects. This trend will spread centuries later through the territories of Europe and America to create a climate of protectionism where each State wanted to maximize its profits by protecting its areas of influence.

However, it is to the Persian language that we owe the origin of the word “customs” which was translated by the Arabic “dioun” and later by the Italian “doana dogana” (Montoussé, 1999: 112-113). This word originally defined the place where the financial administrators met; definition that will evolve in the modern period to designate the administration responsible for collecting duties on goods imported and exported in a territory. Moreover, customs is now asserting itself as being one of the true catalysts of modern economies in this sense, it is thanks to it that a country can ensure its commercial development as well as the protection of its industries in times of crisis. Most of the European powers had analyzed this trend so well that from the beginning of the 20th century, we are going to witness a veritable rush towards new territories, Africa in particular. This rush was intended to put in place a certain number of mechanisms which were to guarantee the imperialist powers a monopoly in

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commercial exchanges. These included customs structures whose main role was the collection of funds from foreign trade. Germany, which was the first colonial power to annex the Cameroonian coasts, accentuated this commercial activity by improving the quality of food production on the one hand, and on the other hand, by developing the communication infrastructures (roads, rail, ports) necessary for the commercial development of the territory to better exploit this new territory which had fallen under its colonial yoke.

To better illustrate our point in this analysis, we will first illustrate the commercial geopolitics between coastal peoples and Europeans before German colonization and secondly, we will focus attention on the first economic mechanisms set up by Germany to regulate customs activities on the Cameroonian coasts.

### **The riches of the Cameroonian coasts and the geopolitics of commercial activities before colonization**

The Cameroonian coast was not unknown to European navigators. It was indeed at the beginning of the 5th century that the Carthaginian Hanno discovered Mount Cameroon in the midst of a volcanic eruption. He will call it “Chariot of the Gods” (Mveng, 1963: 10). It is again the splendor of the mountain that will attract the attention of the crew of Fernando Pô who will thus penetrate the bay of Biafra and go up the Wouri estuary to discover the “Rio Dos Camaroes”. Struck by the splendor and wealth of these wild territories, it was wise to exploit them as quickly as possible. It is in this perspective that the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the English, Germans and French animated the commercial activities on the Cameroonian coasts well before the advent of colonization.

### **The Portuguese period and the beginning of commercial activity on the coast of the Oil River Cameroon**

Between 1472 and 1885, Cameroon experienced the influence of Portugal, Spain and Great Britain. These different nations have developed at the level of the coast, a commercial traffic whose importance will result in the increase in agricultural production and the advent of a market economy, based on currency to the detriment of barter. (Etoga Eily, 1971: 63). As far as Portugal is concerned, this naval power has dominated trade in the Bay of Biafra and particularly on the Cameroonian coast between the 16th and 17th centuries. By far the most practiced activity was the slave trade. The Portuguese structured and organized it; the merchants with the help of the local chiefs left for a real expedition which lasted long weeks through the neighboring territories thanks to the captures, raids and other kidnappings, the slaves were piled up in the converted counters, a kind of deposits which served as a store, beyond, the local chiefs received their counterparties which were mainly made up of “manillas” a kind of brass and copper bracelets, rum, salt, fabrics. Towards the end of the 16th century, we noticed the increasing practice of the use of cowries which served as currency. (Etoga Eily, 1971:69). Little by little, the Portuguese abandoned the Cameroonian coast in favor of the Indies; the Spaniards and the Dutch will monopolize the slave trade.

### **The Spanish and Dutch period**

This period goes from the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century. The slave trade will keep the same configuration as during the Portuguese period. The asiento will pass under the control of the Spanish then the Dutch who, thanks to their powerful and fast ships will arrogate the monopoly of the exchanges in

the coast. The principle was the same, the slaves were exchanged according to the method of barter by products which came from Europe and the East. Only, the slaves of the Cameroonian coasts reputed for their rebellious spirits as noted by E. Mveng were not at all appreciated by the Portuguese and Dutch (Mveng, 1963: 90). With the beginning, the emergence of the philanthropic movements in favor of the abolition of the slave trade in the XVIIth century, the presence of the Spaniards and Dutch begins to lose importance.

### **The English period**

This period, which dates from the end of the 16th century, is marked by the appearance on the Cameroonian coast of the ships of Bristol and Henry King. The latter, a quaker and a convinced philanthropist, came to found a company supplying and transporting goods (Etoga Eily, 1971: 76). With the total ban on the slave trade on the African coasts in the 19th century, the English set up a new exchange system called "Trust". Different from barter, which consisted of give-and-take exchanges of goods, the "trust" consisted of exchanges of goods on credit. In this system, Europeans left goods to local chiefs who then undertook to supply them as soon as following trip a corresponding quantity of palm oil, ivory, kola... the goods left by the Europeans consisted of machetes, gunpowder, guns, salt, loincloths and tobacco. A calculation system was put in place for lack of currency, the English calculated by equivalence of the product in other markets. So, for example, a ton of ivory was valued at 240 pounds (Essomo, 2005: 35). This sum was estimated as follows: for a ton of ivory the English gave 15 kg of salt valued at 15 pounds; 17 barrels of powder corresponding to 51 pounds, 50 rifles equivalent to 30 pounds, 54 cotton goods at 61 pounds, 2 barrels of brandy at 20 pounds, 30 copper utensils at 22 pounds, and various other products at 41 pounds. This gave a total of 241 pounds (Essomo, 2005: 37). The "trust" system necessarily had its limits, the goods recovered on the coast were sold 4 to 5 times more expensive in mainland France. The coastal chiefs like King Bell and King Akwa or Malimba received in the 19th century taxes on the circulation of products, in return, they guaranteed the commercial monopoly of the English. This tax, called "dash", consisted of 40 books, 60 muskets, 2 large measures of rum, 1 ceremonial jacket with epaulettes, 1 sabre. Various other taxes were levied, in particular the tax on the berthing of ships and on the unloading of goods (Etoga Eily, 1971:76).

Meanwhile, the English had continued to fight against the slave trade which continued to be carried out in secret. The climate was becoming more and more explosive between the Europeans and the local populations required rapid regulation. It is in this perspective that was signed between the English Consul Hutchinson and the local leaders Douala (Etoga Eily, 1971:97). The treaty of January 14, 1856 established the creation of a Court of Equity whose role was to judge commercial disputes between Europeans and natives, also the law of 1856 set up a tariff which ships had to pay after their anchorage with local chiefs. The tariff was fixed at 10 Krus/100 T for boats and it was to be determined for residents on the ground. In addition, the shopping fee was set at 4 Krus which the trader paid in advance (Essomo, 2005: 40) .

It is noted that one cannot consider this treaty as being a true customs regulation but, one can grant to him the fact that it constituted the first true base of a commercial activity of great importance; because in the space of 20 years, that is to say in 1876, commercial activity will experience an increase never equaled in the past.

Products from the hinterland flock to the coast Florian Etoga speaks of “a peak”. It is also the period of the advent of other commercial actors such as France and Germany with the firms Woerman, Jantzen und Thormeln. It is also finally the period of the English hesitations about the definitive annexation of Cameroon, an annexation however desired by the local chiefs but which was finally carried out by Germany thanks to the treaty of July 12, 1884 (Mveng, 1963: 168; Owona, 1996).

### **The colonial period: German colonization in Cameroon**

The Germans who took possession of Cameroon as early as 1884 had first, in accordance with the act of the Berlin conference<sup>2</sup> visit and pacify the hinterland in Cameroon before developing it, to then exploit the immense wealth of the territory. We will immediately see how the Germans laid the foundations of a real commercial policy by first studying the development of the customs territory, then the beginnings of exploitation and commercial traffic.

The end of the pre-colonial period was marked by the submission of African countries to European powers. In Cameroon, the Germans were the first to undertake development trials. The English and French inherited this experience with the concern inherent in any colonial enterprise, as Jean Suret Canale pointed out: "The goal of colonization is to carry out advantageous transactions, to sell the products of European industry and to obtain in exchange raw materials or foodstuffs" (Canale, 1962: 79). It is thus a question of seeing how Germany organized its customs activity starting from the development of the territory on the agricultural and industrial level.

### **The economic activities that conditioned the establishment of a precarious customs service in Kamerun**

To fuel the territory's commercial exchanges with the outside world, the Germans undertook the development of the agricultural, forestry and mining sectors. This was first the work of the commercial companies present in the territory and a little later of the colonial administration.

### **The development of the agro-pastoral and mining sector**

As far as commercial companies are concerned, the Woerman firm, through the Chamber of Hamburg, put real pressure on the executive bodies of the imperial empire to push for the granting of capital and territorial concessions in the colony. Other larger companies soon appeared, these were the Nord West Kamerun Gesellschaft in 1890 which received a concession of 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> stretching from the Sanaga to the British border (Mveng, 1963: 74), the Sud Kamerun Gesellschaft appeared in 1898 created by Scharlach and Shalto Douglas, influential men of the empire, this company always received according to E. Mveng, five million hectares, which was reduced to 1 million and a half in 1905 (Mveng, 1963: 74).

The day after the signing of the Germano-Douala treaty, the Germans took possession of Cameroon (Essomo, 2005). The need to supply metropolitan industry with raw materials prompted them to carry out an ambitious cultivation program (Mveng, 1963: 74). Thus, from 1884, the Germans undertook development as a policy of exploitation of Cameroon. This policy was to go through the systematic exploitation of the country's wealth and establish structures responsible for animating the

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<sup>2</sup>This act stipulated above all the principle of the hinterland to penetrate the interior of a colony until it encounters a natural obstacle or a border of a territory signatory to the Berlin Act.

agricultural sector on the one hand industrial on the other (Owona, 1996: 76-77). and because of the favorable conditions for agricultural practice in most regions of Cameroon, the Germans had developed an agrarian policy. They proceeded first by creating large concessions with the intention of doing development by chartered companies. Thus, the territory was divided into two large concessions: the Gesellschaft Sud Kamerun and the Gesellschaft Nord-West Kamerun (Chazelas, 1931: 55).

**Photo n° 1: German plantations during the colonial period**



Source: Essomo, 2005: 15-25.

The Gesellschaft Sud Kamerun or the Southern Cameroon Concessionaire Company was established on November 28, 1898 (Etoga Eily, 1971: 182). Its founders were Julius Scharlach and Schalt Douglas. Located in the virgin forest of southern Cameroon, this concession had 7,200,000 ha. It produced in 1908 1214 tons of rubber for an estimated value of 4,780,000 marks (Etoga Eily, 1971: 183). From 1909, the production of rubber increased considerably to 1517 tons, the value of which was estimated at 7,751,000 marks. (Etoga Eily, 1971: 183). In 1912, he brought in the Southern Concession, 11.5 million marks.

The Gesellschaft Nord West-Kamerun or Northwest Cameroon Concessionary Company was founded in 1890. It stretched from the Sanaga to the British border in the West. But its exploitation was confronted with many financial difficulties. It is for this reason that the Germans abandoned the policy of large concessions to devote themselves to that of large plantations (Mveng, 1963: 120). inside hence the question of development. They proposed to divert towards the West of the territory the commercial currents which tended to take shape either towards the North or the South. However, apart from this strategic objective, the mission assigned to the companies benefiting from the large plantations was reduced to: the exploitation of the land, (Etoga Eily, 1971: 363).

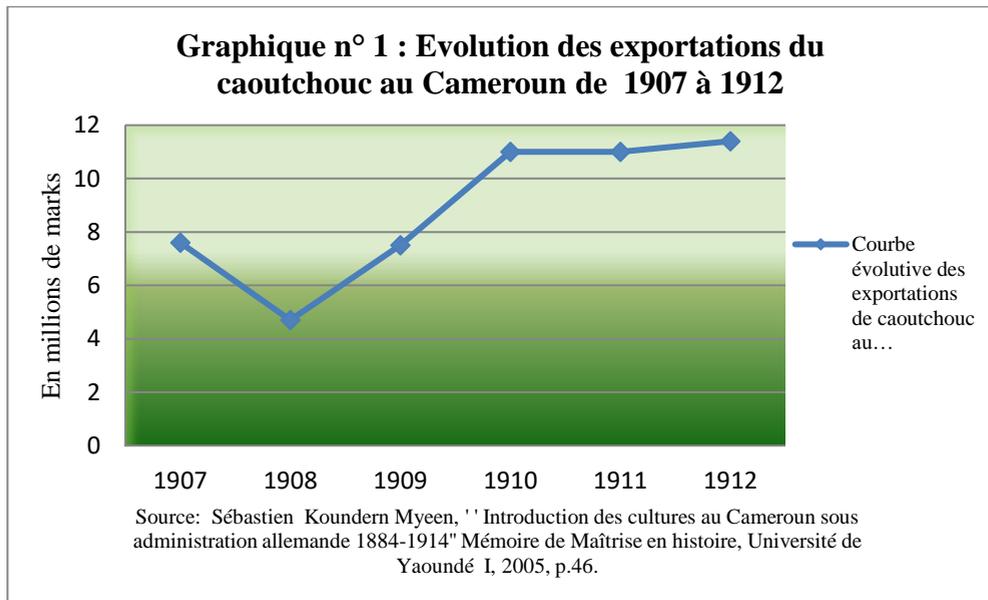
Among the companies of plantations, one quotes: the company of Victoria founded in January 1895 with a capital estimated at 2.500.000 marks. The Victoria Society Bibundi created in 1897 whose capital was estimated at 1500,000 marks. The

West Afrikanische Pflanzung Gesellschaft Victoria founded in 1897, with an area of 15,000 ha and an estimated capital of 3 million marks (Etoga Eily, 1971: 363). Alongside these large plantations there were a multitude of small plantations<sup>3</sup>. In these plantations, rubber was grown. It was for a long time the cash crop of the German protectorate in Cameroon. These exports were regular from 1907 to 1912. In 1913, the official directory of the colonies indicated that the plantations of Cameroon covered 28,225 ha, of which 11,395 were in production for the cultivation of palm trees, 5,044 ha for the cultivation of bananas and 2,164 ha for cocoa, coffee tobacco and rubber (Famechon, 1916: 46).

**Table n° 1: Evolution of rubber exports in Cameroon from 1907 to 1912**

Years Nomenclature	1907	1908	1909	1910	1911	1912
Value in millions of marks	7.6	4.7	7.5	11.0	11.0	11.4

**Source:** Sébastien Koundern Myeen, "Introduction of cultures in Cameroon under German administration 1884-1914", Master's thesis in History, University of Yaoundé I, 2005, p. 46.



<sup>3</sup>Among these, one could mention the Oechehausen plantation with an area of 2050 ha, the Ekona plantation of the Deutsche Kautschuk Aktien-Gesellschaft which had 4000 ha, the Méanja plantation, that of the Palottin fathers of Tiko and that of the Afrikanische Frucht Kompagnie which exploited banana trees. In 1913, German plantations in Cameroon covered an area of 28,225 ha, of which 11,395 were already exploited.

From this table, it appears that the first three years mark a phase of cultural experimentation. While the last three mark a period of prosperity for this culture.

Speaking of cocoa, it was grown in the regions of Mount Cameroon and Kumbo, Kribi (Baudeau, 1969: 73). This culture was intended to revolutionize the economy of Cameroon.

**Table n° 2: Areas occupied by cocoa plantations in 1912**

<b>Nomenclature Regions</b>	<b>Number of hectares</b>
<b>Mount Cameroon</b>	6.587
<b>Kumba</b>	529.5
<b>Kribi</b>	116
various	390.5

Source: Etoga Eily, On the paths of development, p. 196.

The largest cocoa plantation in the territory at the time was that of the WestAfrikanische Pflanzungs Gesellschaft Victoria (WAPV) whose production was 1600 tons in 1912 for a value of 1,600,000 marks. Coffee had also been the subject of great hopes for the plantations of Mount Cameroon. It was introduced in 1905 under Von Puttkamer (Baudeau, 1969: 73). But the tests undertaken did not bring the expected results because of the Brazilian coffee which was rampant on the world market. The banana benefited from favorable ecological conditions, the banana tree seemed to find in Cameroon one of the best lands for cultivation. From 1907, the Germans developed this crop from varieties found locally through the Afrikanische Frucht Cie of Hamburg (ANY. APA10247, 1931; ANY. APA113/C, 1930; ANY.APA1185, 1936).

Peanuts, a crop in the forest zone, were hardly developed. Groundnuts were grown as a vegetable and not as an export product. Thus, its yields hardly reached 500 kg (ANY.APA1185, 1936: 2-5). The oil palm in Cameroon as on the whole western coast of Africa, the oil palm seems to have developed since ancient times. It came in the form of a natural plant. The Germans were however going to develop this culture in the maritime zone: the palm-blet in Edéa and in the Mungo. Regarding tobacco, the Germans tried to develop it. The first tests illustrate this perfectly. They would later create the Bibundi plantation in the Mungo region (Etoga Eily, 1971: 401). Other cultures of less importance were practiced such: the rubber tree, the sisal were promised with a beautiful future. The following table shows the agricultural situation of the entire German colonization.

**Table n° 3: Agricultural situation of the entire German colonization**

<b>Nomenclature Products</b>	<b>Areas (ha)</b>	<b>Number of plants</b>
<b>oil palms</b>	5044	1,257,569
<b>Banana trees</b>	2164	1,921,345
<b>Cocoa trees</b>	13.161	7,791,078

<b>Coffee trees</b>	107	115.564
<b>Tobacco</b>	153	2,052,000
<b>Ficus</b>	43	41.150
<b>Collaborators</b>	164	17.659
<b>Kicksia</b>	3.588	4.6963.909
<b>Cassava</b>	175	116.721
<b>Rubber vines</b>	---	20.350
<b>rubber tree</b>	3.589	1,143,803
<b>Castilla</b>	07	2.584
<b>Sisal</b>	30	26.015
<b>Total</b>	28.225	19.202.747

Source: Etoga Eily, *On the paths of development*, p. 199.

The analysis of this table shows that Cameroon under German colonization had exploited 28,225 ha for 19,202,747 plants. The most cultivated crops were: cocoa, oil palm, Kicksia, banana and rubber tree.

For industry, the Germans had thought of development as a policy for the exploitation of Cameroon. This policy was to go through a systematic exploitation of the country's wealth by relying on the large German commercial firms: Woerman and Jantzen und Thormahlen (Owona, 1996: 75-76). However, despite this commercial flowering, even a local processing industry was struggling to develop. From 1905, the Germans had thought of developing some industries. These were made up of wood and palm oil factories, bakeries and brickyards. For Adalbert Owona: "Most of them were ancillary businesses of the Northern Railway Company and some palm oil, soap and brick factories (Richard, 1996: 41).

However, each factory specialized in a specific job. Bakeries ensured the marketing of bread and products such as biscuits, rusks, croissants and cakes (Owona, 1996: 78). Rail developed through the timber industry in the Wouri estuary where mangrove trees abounded (Tabi, 1978: 60; ANY. APA 12358, 1921-1950). Fishing was hardly left out. It developed through the Wutembergisches Kamerun Gesellschaft (Etoga Eily, 1971: 293-294).

The colonial authority, for its part, initiated research aimed at identifying the agricultural potential of each region. Thus, Zenker carried out research in Yaoundé, Von Stein in Lolodorf and Passage in Adamaoua (Noumi, 1992: 11). Vast plantations appeared all over the territory, in Petit-Batanga, Lolodorf, Ebolowa, Ngoulemakong, Victoria. Bananas, cocoa, rubber, coffee, cotton were grown there. The slopes of Mount Cameroon were also exploited, the Moungo region was covered with oil palm. Selected plants and seeds of new plants were distributed to the natives to promote the expansion of agriculture. The agricultural sector alone required the employment of 200,000 workers (Mveng, 1963:77). Logging and mining are not left out. The German colonial authority developed and exploited the rich ores of iron and bauxite as well as rare species of wood such as mahogany, ebony. This is how the general state of the agricultural aspect of Cameroon presented itself in 1913.

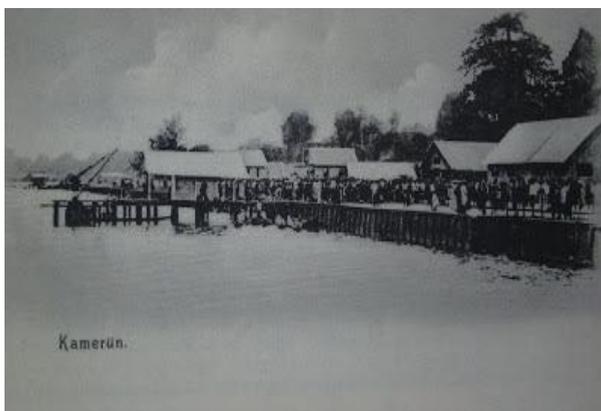
With regard to mining, the extraction of mineral resources has remained very limited in Cameroon despite the presence of large deposits of bauxite and iron (Kima,

1999: 2-3). It was in 1920 that the government of the territory began to apply the decree on mining regulations in Cameroon. This same decree made applicable the provisions of the decrees of August 4, 1901, March 19, 1905, January 8, 1916 and July 28, 1918 regulating mines in continental African territories other than Algeria and Tunisia (Mimier, 1943 : 89). Decrees on mining regulations would later be promulgated in Cameroon on March 20, 1928, and modified by the decree of February 5, 1935 (Direction de la Géologie Minière, 1969: 5-25). Operation

#### **The development of communication infrastructure in Kamerun**

The construction of the port of Douala was the real catalyst for the establishment of a customs system by the Germans in Cameroon. The development of the bank of the Wouri, near Douala, was undertaken by the firm Woerman Linie, following the first agreement with the Douala chiefs (Canale, 1962: 79). The following photo shows us the first developments of the port of Douala at that time.

**Photo no. 2:**the bank of the Wouri and the first developments of the port of Douala during the German colonial period (1890-1891)



Source: Viallet Michel, Douala in the past. Collection of old postcards of Douala, Paris, Atlantica, 2002, p. 47.

These works were indeed carried out by the administrator E. Brauchitsch, under the authority of the governor Jesko Von Puttkamer and this administrator was considered as the builder of Douala (Owona, 1996: 75-76), he transformed the traditional African village in the modern city: laying out of wide streets, draining of the Bonaku swamp, improvement and expansion of the port, construction of the dyke (raised passage) between Joss and Akwa, draining of the swamp between Akwa and Deido, beginning of the water channeling current in Douala (Famechon, 1916: 4). The Germans intended to make the port of Douala the most modern port on the West African coast, believing that the absence of a bar gave it a decisive advantage compared to the other ports on the coast (Gouellain, 2002: 48).

#### **The development of communication infrastructures**

Given the lack of adequate means of communication, the Germans had contented themselves with portage. This system, which consisted in the transport of goods and various products on the backs of men and over a more or less long distance, was not able to generate the expected profit, this because of the time that was put into the evacuation of the products from the premises of production to the places of production. The Germans therefore undertook to develop road, rail, river and maritime communication infrastructures.

With regard to land transport, the road was perceived as being the only real means that could allow access to the most remote corners of the hinterland. The German colonial authority first proceeded to the construction of a motorable road network, the South which was an important economic region saw the first motorable road 286 km long; it connected Kribi to Yaoundé and was completed in 1912 (Mveng, 1963: 78).

Similarly, the Kribi-Ebolowa branch was to be completed the same year. An automobile company whose role was to accentuate the development of road equipment and the setting up of road construction projects was created. The eastern sector was equipped, Kribi was connected to Douala with a branch to Edéa, we also had the Tiko-Buéa road. Thanks to the automobile company of South Cameroon, all the regions of Cameroon in 1914 were equipped with an appreciable road network.

The northern railway was to connect Douala to the important plantations of Moungo (Nkongssamba) starting from Bonabéri heading towards the mountainous massifs of Manengouba. This railway, which should normally be pushed north, will be confronted with enormous natural difficulties, in particular that of the very rugged terrain of the Nkongssamba region.

In 1911, it was completed and the inauguration took place on April 11 of the same year, as noted by E. Mveng, its equipment consists of: “six locomotives, nine wagons, sixty-one vans, fourteen special wagons with a staff of twenty Europeans and one hundred and ten Cameroonians”<sup>4</sup>. The central railway was to serve the southern and south-eastern regions located mainly in the forest zone rich in oil palm, rubber and above all favorable to the cultivation of cocoa and coffee. In 1914, 174 km were open to traffic from Douala to Eséka. It is in this perspective that the German colonial authority developed a precarious system of customs services in Kamerun.

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<sup>4</sup>Mveng, History of Cam..., p. 78.

### Commercial traffic and the beginnings of a customs system

In view of the German surveys and the many assets that Kamerun presented, the various commercial companies and the administration came together to put in place the structures responsible for controlling commercial traffic. It should be noted that it was in 1879 that the imperial empire set up a customs code which was readjusted in 1885 after the Berlin conference for the needs of the colonies (Nkoti Bohale, 1986: 17). It is in this perspective that the Germans implemented a customs policy which was to promote the spirit of exchanges, contained in the final act of the Berlin conference in its article 26. This article recommended that freedom of trade and of navigation on the conventional basins of the Niger and the Congo which would remain free for merchant ships of all nations, both for the transport of goods and for men. It is on the strength of this conception that the Germans set up in Cameroon a customs policy called “open door” with non-preferential tariffs which were levied ad valorem on imports (Nkoti Bohale, 1986: 17). In other words, countries that signed the Berlin Final Act could sell and buy in Cameroon. To regulate this commercial activity, which promised to be intense, the administration set up the economic committee or Kolonial Wirtschaftliches Komitee in 1898 (Mveng, 1963: 70). This committee, which was attached to the Kolonial Gesellschaft (colonial society) in 1902, played a leading role in the promotion of German foreign trade. This chamber of commerce, the Kolonial Wirtschaftliches Komitee had the role of promoting foreign trade through the organization of exhibition fairs:

- Popularize Cameroonian commercial products in mainland France;
- Diversify Germany's economic partners;
- Publish books, maps and brochures promoting Cameroon in other countries.

This policy had conclusive results insofar as there was a noticeable increase in commercial activity. The table below shows the evolution of foreign trade in German Cameroon from 1903.

**Table n° 4: Evolution of the foreign trade of German Kamerun 1903-1913**

Years	Imports	Exports	Total trade
1903	9,638,000	7,565,000	17,203,000
1904	9,378,000	8,021,000	17,399,000
1905	13,467,000	315,000	22,758,000
1906	13,305,000	9,946,000	23,251,000
1907	17,297,000	15,891,000	33,188,000
1908	16,789,000	12,163,000	28,952,000
1909	17,722,000	15,447,000	33,169,000
1910	25,580,000	1,923,000	45,503,000
1911	29,317,000	21,250,000	50,567,000
1912	34,241,000	23,336,000	57,577,000
1913	43,000,000	36,000,000	79,000,000

Source: CC. Foreign trade 1944-1950 (summary), year 1944

A careful examination of this table shows generally between 1903 and 1913 that the commercial activity of the German Cameroons is clearly increasing. The years 1903-1904 were not very important because of the lack of means of communication. From 1907, imports and exports reached the 15,000,000 mark, with 17,297,000 mark/gold for imports and 15,891,000 mark/gold. Between 1912/1913, commercial traffic reached the record base of 34,241,000 and 43,000,000 mark/gold for 23,336,000 and 36,000,000 mark. This with a trading total of 79,000,000 mark/gold. Nevertheless, a general observation can be made: the trade balance of German Cameroon is constantly in deficit. Between 1903 and 1913, the imports are higher than the exports this is due to the fact of the enormous cost of the heavy materials necessary for the equipment of the territory. Of all the German colonies, Cameroon was the one that received the smallest subsidy. In 1912, it was at 71,144,000<sup>5</sup>marks.

### Conclusion

At the end of our analysis, it was a question of knowing how the geopolitics of natural resources and the commercial activities on the Cameroonian coasts had aroused the rush of the Western maritime powers of the 15th century and later the establishment of a customs system. by the Germans who annexed Kamerun in 1884. Throughout this analysis, it has been noted that the hinterland of pre-colonial Cameroon was full of many natural resources. Commercial transactions between the pre-colonial peoples of the hinterland and those of the coast were intense and permanent. It is in this perspective that the coastal peoples positioned themselves as intermediaries between those of the interior and the Europeans in terms of commercial transactions. Consequently, the natural resources they displayed on the trading posts successively attracted the Portuguese, the Spaniards, the Dutch, the English and the Germans to the Cameroonian coasts. An intense commercial traffic was born to the point where when Germany annexed Kamerun by the Germano-Douala treaty of July 12, 1884. Thus to particularly regulate foreign trade in its new colony, the Germans began to develop communication infrastructures, especially maritime as was the case of the port of Douala, the road and rail network. The Germans implemented in Cameroon a so-called “open door” customs policy with non-preferential tariffs which were levied on imports. To regulate this commercial activity which promised to be intense, the administration set up the economic committee or Kolonial Wirtschaftliches Komitee in 1898 (Mveng, 1963: 70). This committee, which was attached to the Kolonial Gesellschaft (colonial society) in 1902, played a leading role in the promotion of German foreign trade. When the First World War broke out in 1914, Germany had already set up an embryonic customs service in Cameroon, which was later developed by France, which was the new occupier of Cameroon.

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<sup>5</sup> Etoga, On the roads..., p. 255.

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