

**Putting representational boots on other feet: Moukarim postcards from
Cameroon c 1914-15**

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Abstract

This paper analyses a set of 28 postcards taken in Cameroon during WW1 by a photographer of Lebanese origin, one of the Moukarim brothers. It throws light on a period of Cameroonian history, on the images and their place in photographic history. The postcards that the Moukarims took cannot be viewed simply as exemplifying the colonial gaze: the visual economy is more complicated than that. The images provide a lens on internationalism, lending a perspective from which to think about the complex set of actors who helped to make and to represent history.

Keywords: Cameroon, Cameroun, Kamerun, Moukarim, Lebanese, WW1,
photography

Resumé

Cet article présente un ensemble de 28 cartes postales prises au Cameroun pendant la Première Guerre mondiale par un photographe d'origine libanaise, l'un des frères Moukarim. Il met en lumière une période de l'histoire camerounaise, les images et leur place dans l'histoire de la photographie. Les cartes postales prises par les Moukarim ne peuvent être considérées comme un simple exemple du regard colonial : l'économie visuelle est plus complexe que cela. Les images offrent un regard sur l'internationalisme, une perspective qui permet de réfléchir à l'ensemble complexe des acteurs qui ont contribué à faire et à représenter l'histoire.

Mots clef: Cameroon, Cameroun, Kamerun, Moukarim, libanaise, WW1, photographie

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Introduction

Objects tell stories; people tell stories. Objects tell stories about people; people tell stories about objects, which lead to stories about other people. Photographs are objects whose stories connect people, objects, places and times in ways that may sometimes confuse, but can also richly reveal. This is the challenge of historical research, particularly that undertaken by an anthropologist, particularly when undertaken on old photographs.

In 2001 the historian Peter Burke called for wider use of visual representations as evidence in historical research. This paper seeks to apply his call to Cameroonian history and the connections made across what are now national boundaries by a set of postcards published during the First World War. The Moukarim postcards defy the over-simplification of orthodox accounts about the colonial gaze, and indeed about processes of colonialism. The mission of academic research involves challenging simplistic accounts that reductively render the richness of barely distinguishable greys as bare black and white. Our mission is to realise a new sort of comparative research that accommodates overlooked complexity.

The photographer Moukarim was a non-European expatriate in the German colony of Kamerun. Part of the early twentieth century diaspora of Druze people from what is now Lebanon, many of whom worked as merchants all along the West African coast, Moukarim's photographs are not those of the colonizers but neither those of the colonised. Like many binary classifications what is appealingly straightforward at first, turns out to have a deeply ambiguous blurry middle ground.¹

Some questions, and limits to possible answers

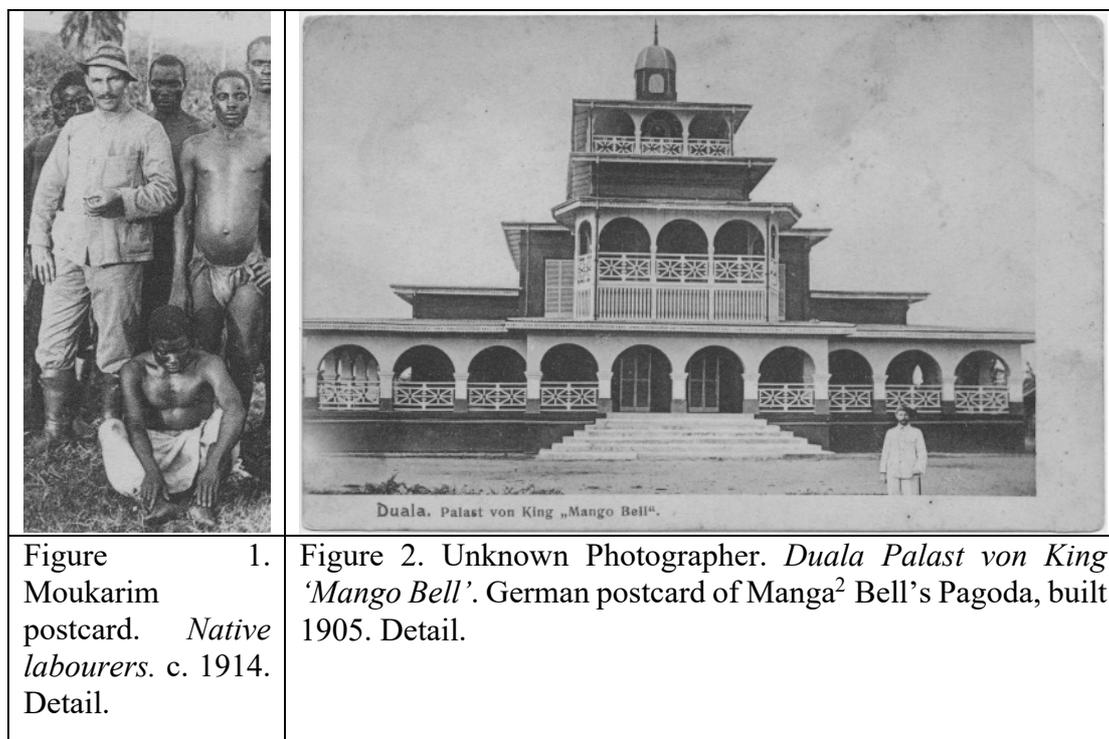
Who are the people in these pictures? Who took the photographs and why? The images being at least a century old, it is unsurprising that we neither know nor can discover

¹ Schneider 2024 considers a parallel case but from a later date connecting a remote French town with Cameroon through a set of connection following the Second World War.

much about them. However, we can make connections which reveal something about the environment in which they were made.

In this paper I present a set of 28 postcards from the same photographer produced during WW1. I use them to throw light on a period of Cameroonian history and to consider the place of the images in photographic history. Unlike many other postcards of the era, these can be identified by the authorship inscribed on the front: 'Moukarim Frères Duala and Libreville'. After this helpful start, however, and like many early postcards, no other documentation is available. Below, helped by the postcards and the archival sources I have uncovered, I trace multiple histories, and multiple routes through the histories.

The thing about photographs and photo history is the blurriness. This forces us to accept that not everything is recoverable by research: there are things we will never know. Consider the people in Figures 1 and 2: not just the two white men, but all of those depicted.



We will probably never know who any of these men were, not the white men nor the 'porters' in the image on the left (Figure 1, full image Figure 4). Although the poses of

² *Manga* is the normal orthography despite the original caption for this card.

the white men are similar to each other the print quality is too poor to enable a detailed comparison. And although we know something about the photographer of the image on the left (see below) we know nothing about the image on the right, and probably never will. There are names and stories that are may well be unrecoverable (although I have not yet given up trying). Reanimation through historical research has its limits.

The most general point about the Moukarim postcards is that they seem initially to make little sense as a set. However, analysis reveals a logical connection between them, which illuminates issues facing expatriates living in colonial Cameroon in wartime. To understand this we need to consider a range of comparative evidence.

An initial history of the Moukarim postcards

I consider here the postcard captions, the places and dates they were taken, and then make connections and more detailed comments on some of the images. (Some are enigmatic and I have been unable to find any information about them. Some of the captions in Table 1 turn out to be misleading.

Table 1. The Moukarim postcards and their bilingual captions (linguistic infelicities are those of the originals and have not been marked).

English caption	French caption	Location
Bell Town	Une des rues de Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Boat races Duala	Courses des Pirogues 14 juillet, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
British gunners during the war	Cannoniers anglais durant la guerre, Cameroun	
Duala girl	Jeune fille, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Duala Marina I	Marina Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Duala Marina II	Marina Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Duala Marina III	Marina Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Duala Marina IV	Marina Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Duala Marina V	Marina Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Beauty Duala	Une elegante de Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Edea Women	Jeunes filles d'Edea, Cameroun	Edea
Éléphant Duala	Un jeune éléphant, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
English Trench, Edea	Tranchée anglaise à Edea, Cameroun	Edea
Fetich Jabasi	Un chef feticheur de Jabassi, Cameroun	Yabassi
Government House	Palais du gouvernement de Duala, Cameroun	Douala

Hospital Duala	Hôpital de Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Hotel Duala	Hôtel de Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Japoma Bridge	Pont de chemin de fer de Japoma, Cameroun	Edea
King St Douala	Avenue du Roi Georges V à Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Market Jabasi	Marche de Jabassi, Cameroun	Yabassi
Market, Edea	Paysans Indigènes, Edea, Cameroun	Edea
Native chair makers	Fabricants de Chaises, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Native House Duala	Village Indigène, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Native House Duala [Card 2]	Village Indigène, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Native Labourers	Porteurs allemands durant la guerre, Cameroun	Douala
Native King's Palace	Palais du Roi Indigène, Duala, Cameroun	Douala
The Arrival of Nigeria Govenor in Duala	Arrivé du Gouverneur de Nigeria débarquant au warf de Duala, Cameroun	Douala
Yawode's Carriers	Femmes indigènes de Yawoundé, Duala, Cameroun	Yaoundé

Some 20 of the 28 photographs appear to have been taken in Douala, three in Edea, one or two in Yabassi, one in the bush and the final one possibly in or near Yaoundé – if the caption contains a significant error (see below).

All the cards are marked on the verso ‘Imp. R. Pruvost, 159, r. Montmartre – Paris’.³ They were printed in Paris during the First World War, which may explain the mistakes in the captioning. Proofs were probably not checked before the cards were printed, so no one noticed the addition of ‘Duala, Cameroun’ to the last card, or corrected the inconsistencies between the texts in English and those in French. Imprimerie Pruvost were producing bilingual captions for their postcards of France’s western front at that time, and it may well have been their initiative to add the English captions.⁴

In summary, it seems that one of three Moukarim brothers was a photographer, and that, following the departure or internment of the Germans, he took the opportunity to have his images printed as postcards. They were printed in Paris, and I suspect this

³ One Leon Pruvost was then a postcard publisher/printer in Normandy (see http://jumieges.free.fr/Duclair_Deschamps.html). I have found no connection between his company and R Pruvost in Paris, although it may well exist, nor have I been able to trace any archives of the Pruvost printers in Paris.

⁴ At this time Pruvost printed a series of postcards from the Western front with similarly formatted bilingual captions. See e.g. <https://perma.cc/UN6C-BH6M>.

was a single order that was never repeated. Despite this occurring during the First World War, somehow the Moukarim brothers managed to arrange the printing and payment, send the images from Cameroon to Paris for printing, and receive the postcards back in Cameroon by early 1916. In the circumstance this is remarkable. Some of the cards were posted in February 1916; the earliest franking so far documented is from Douala on 15 February (Maddocks 1996:154) although most are dated from 1917 onwards. The postcards continue to have a life, circulating occasionally on online auction sites, but also being sent as postcards as recently (if that is the right word) as the late 1960s. The latest franking I have documented is from France on 11 May 1969.

A history of a place and a time

We must start with a brief summary of the relevant history. The German colony of Kamerun was established by decree on 14 July 1884, and ended during the First World War, with the official surrender of the last German forces in North Cameroon in 1916. (We will be concerned more with the first part of the Cameroons Campaign 1914-1915).

The economic side of the German period in south Cameroon was characterised by the development of cocoa and oil palm plantations and the exploitation of wild rubber. During this period British trading companies such as R.W. King and John Holt (later incorporated into Leverhulme) had a presence in German Kamerun including posts in Douala but they were not the dominant figures that were German companies such as Carl Woermann Co., and the firm Jantzen & Thormahlen. The cessation of trading by these companies in Cameroon (as the country became known) because of the war meant that there were opportunities not only for the British firms already mentioned but also for other traders such as the Moukarims.

The German colony was established as part of the so-called scramble for Africa that characterised the late nineteenth century in Africa and it took place in a context in which British Baptist missionaries (led by Alfred Saker) had been established since 1858 in Limbe (then called Victoria). We should note that Jamaican missionaries had been active in the area since 1842. The Basel mission arrived in 1886, and German Catholic missionaries in 1890 (Messina and van Slageren 2005: 139).

The point here is not particularly about Christian missions but that a trading town like Douala was by c. 1910 a cosmopolitan port in which there was regular

connection to Fernando Po (now Bioko, Equatorial Guinea), Gabon and Congo to the South, and to the West and North to Nigeria and beyond it Ghana (Gold Coast) and Senegal on the way to Europe. We know there were itinerant photographers moving along the coast on the trading boats – the work of the Lutterodt family is among the best documented (Geary 2017, Haney 2010, 2013): coming from Gold Coast they were active in Douala and on Fernando Po (Bioko), although the dates are not certain. In the same period Francis W. Joaque (based in Fernando Po) among others was also active in Cameroon (see Schneider 2010, 2014 and 2018). We should also note that at least one member of the prominent Douala Bell family, William Mudisa Bell, had become a photographer before 1890 (a photograph from that date is in the Basel Mission archive), perhaps he was the first *Cameroon*-born photographer. Aitken and Rosenheft (2013) give names for some other contenders.

The First World War in Africa was not much discussed in Europe during the centenary period despite the actual first shots of the war being fired by Sergeant-Major Alhaji Grunshi in Togo⁵. As summarised by the title of William Boyd's wonderful novel about the war in Tanzania, from the vantage of Europe it has been seen as 'An Ice-Cream War' (1982).

The run up to the First World War in Cameroon was characterised by ongoing political disputes between the German administration and the prominent families in Douala (e.g the Bells and the Akwas) which culminated in the tragic hanging of Rudolf Manga Bell and Ngoso Din by the Germans on 8th August 1914. These have been extensively explored elsewhere so I will not go into them here (see e.g. Bommarius 2015).⁶

The point in focusing on the details of the beginning of the military Cameroons Campaign soon after the war started in 1914 is that it allows some of the photographs to be dated with some accuracy, as we shall see. Critical to the chronology is that once

⁵ According to the British official history of World War One, it officially started on 28th July 1914. The Gold Coast-born Sergeant-Major Grunshi fired the first shot of the war on 7th August 1914 (Moberly 1931: 40-41).

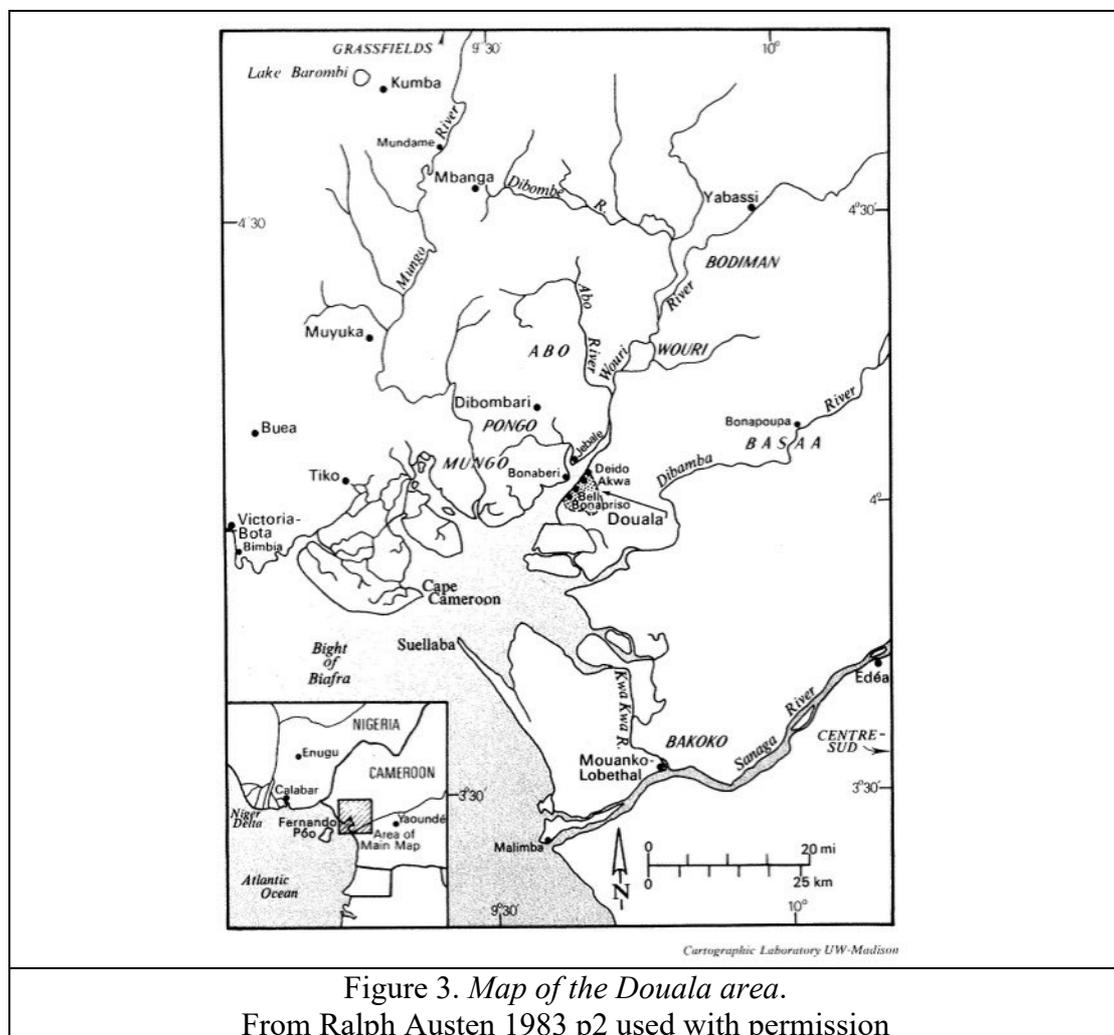
⁶ It should be noted that before the German colony was established negotiations had taken place between prominent people in Douala and the British about them entering the British sphere of influence. This contributed to a general sense of suspicion between the Germans and the Cameroonian elite.

the Cameroons Campaign by British and French troops started, Douala fell to the allies very quickly (by the end of September 1914).

Once the South of the country had been taken (by early 1915) the German merchants and other civilians were interned (there were later accusations of mistreatment of German prisoners). French administration was established in Douala and its surroundings on a temporary basis that was later ratified as part of the post war settlement (the German colony was split (approx. 80% / 20%) between French and British administrations under League of Nations mandates).

A second history of the Moukarim postcards

Maps and distances



In terms of where the photographs were taken, the important distances on this map are Douala -Yabassi /Jabassi: 58 km and Douala -Edea 54 km. Yaoundé, the present-day capital of Cameroon, is almost 225 km due east of Douala. It was then a regional centre.

Let us now consider the dates some of the photographs were taken then continue to discuss some of the other images in more detail. As we shall see in some cases the captions are less than helpful. Several of the postcards are included in both Jacques Soulillou's copiously illustrated revue of the history of depictions of Douala (1989) and Michal Viallet's (2002) collection of postcards of Douala. The captions in those books sometimes provide additional information about the scenes depicted in the Moukarim cards as will become evident below.

Dateable images

There are five postcards that are dateable with any degree of accuracy. I will discuss these in approximate chronological order.

The Cameroons Campaign started soon after war was declared in July 1914 and Douala fell to the Allies on 27th September 1914 (Gorges 1920: 148, see also the official account of the Cameroons Campaign: Moberly 1931). Since we know from the subsequent photographs and other documentary evidence that the Moukarims stayed in Douala, the following image must have been taken in August or September 1914.⁷ If, that is, we take the French caption at face value (*Porteurs allemands durant la guerre, Cameroun*). If we believe the unspecific English caption (*Native labourers*) it could have been taken earlier, before the war had started or even somewhat later!

⁷ This is illustrated by Ranèse Tchamba Ngotom (2018: 261-263) in the context of a discussion of German porter recruitment.

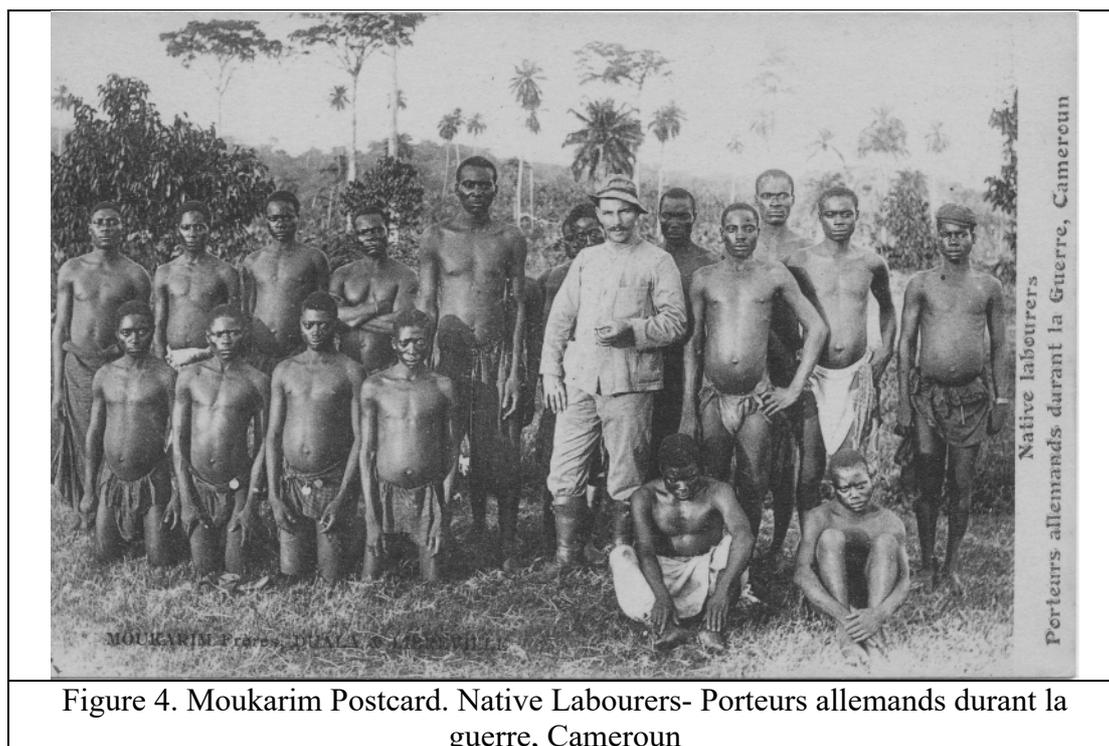


Figure 4. Moukarim Postcard. Native Labourers- Porteurs allemands durant la guerre, Cameroun

Following the fall of Douala the allied troops (including some naval personnel using naval guns that had been given wheels) made various attempts to take Jabassi and then Edea in the October 1914. During the first attack on Jabassi, Col. Vaughan and troops became exhausted dragging a 12 pounder overland (Gorges 1920: 160). The second attack on Edea included taking the cruiser HMS Challenger's field gun cross country from Yapoma (Gorges 1920: 168). Gorges gives an illustration of this on page 210 but this shows a different gun from that visible in the Moukarim photograph. However, his account implies a fairly precise date for the following image as being taken during October 1914:

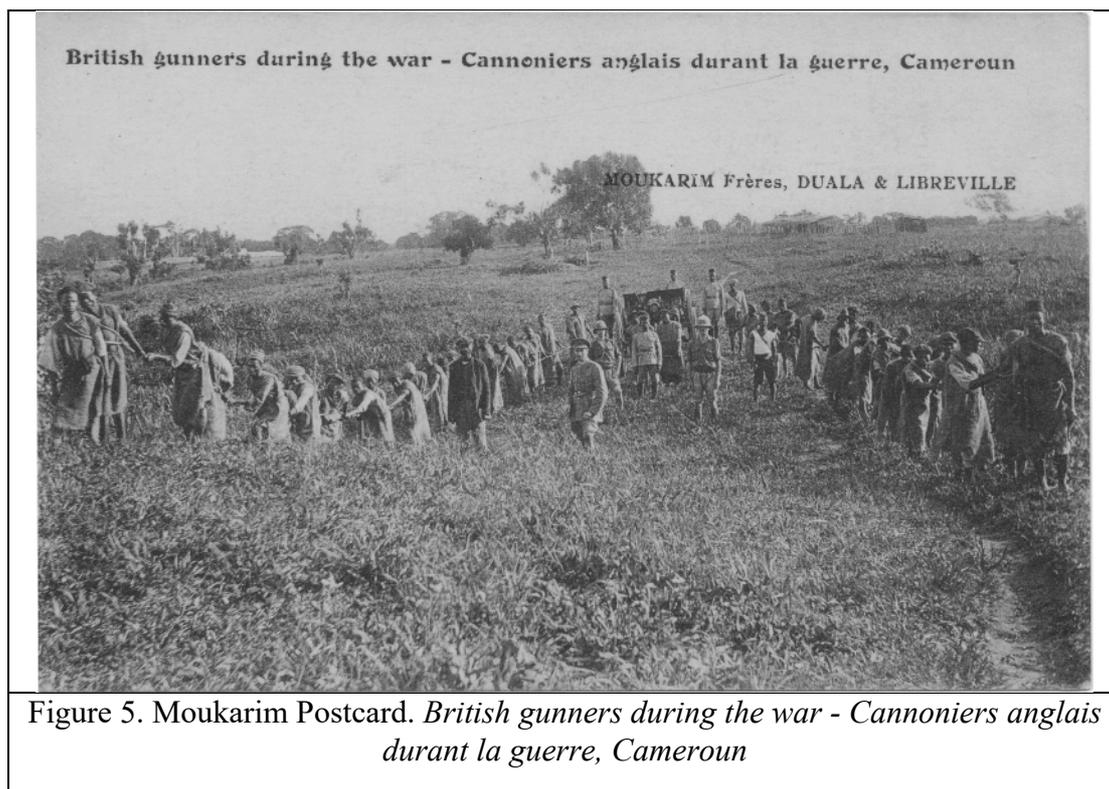


Figure 5. Moukarim Postcard. *British gunners during the war - Canoniers anglais durant la guerre, Cameroun*

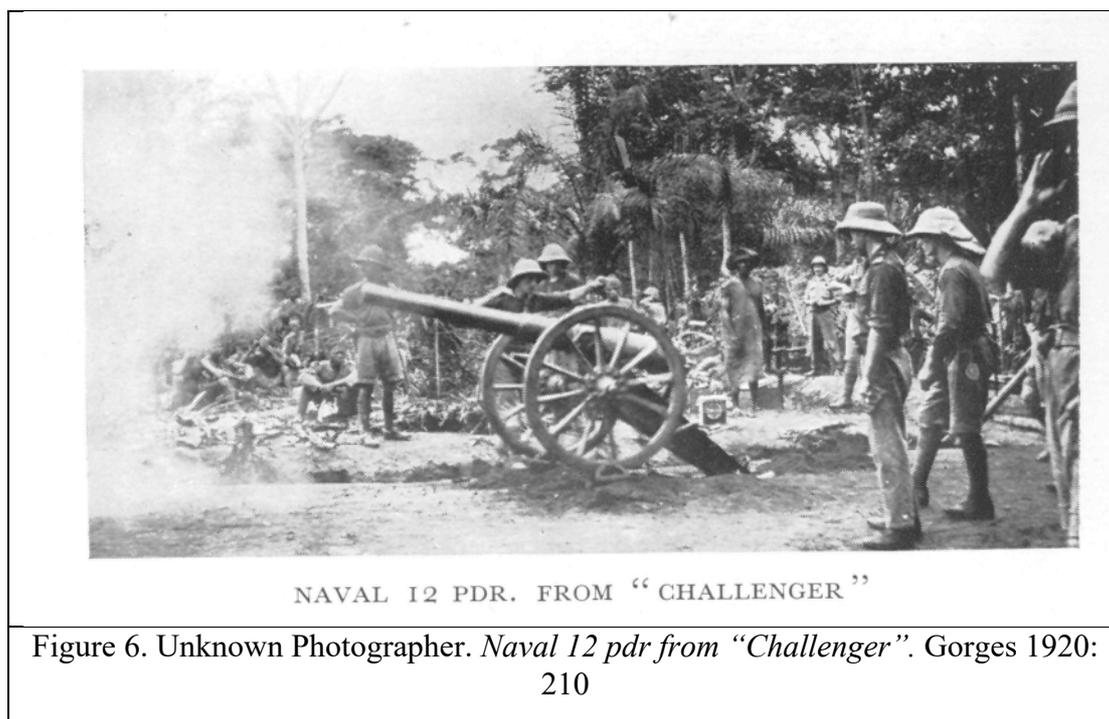


Figure 6. Unknown Photographer. *Naval 12 pdr from "Challenger"*. Gorges 1920: 210

The town and strategically important crossing of the Sanaga river at Edea was taken on 26th October 1914 (Gorges 1920: 170) and resisted a strong German counter-attack on 5th January 1915 (Strachan 2004: 36 see also Wrigley 1918: 160-169). As Gorges put it ‘so admirably had the French Commander (Colonel Mayer) planned his defences) ...

that this attack signally failed.’ (Gorges 1920: 198). However the military record makes the postcard caption odd: although the original operation to *take* Edea was a combined Anglo-French operation Edea was then *held* by French troops. So although the nationality of the troops in the following image is not entirely clear (the uniforms cannot be resolved sufficiently clearly to distinguish them) we can date it to the period November 1914 to mid January 1915.

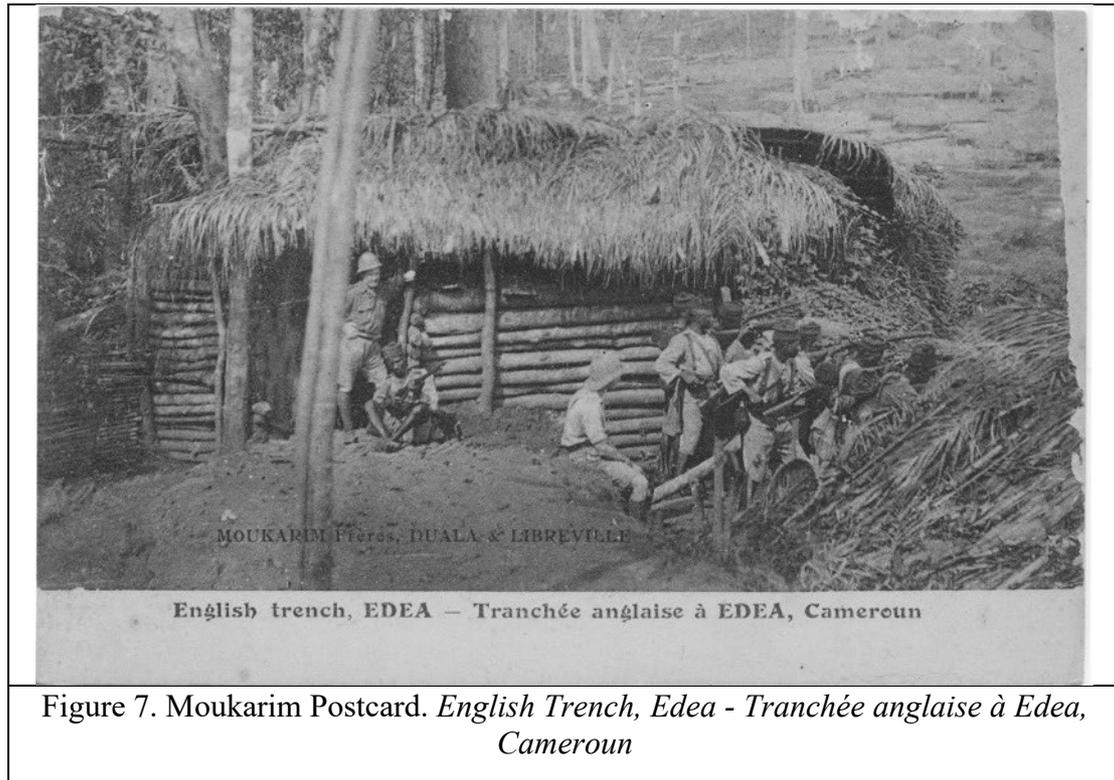


Figure 7. Moukarim Postcard. *English Trench, Edea - Tranchée anglaise à Edea, Cameroun*

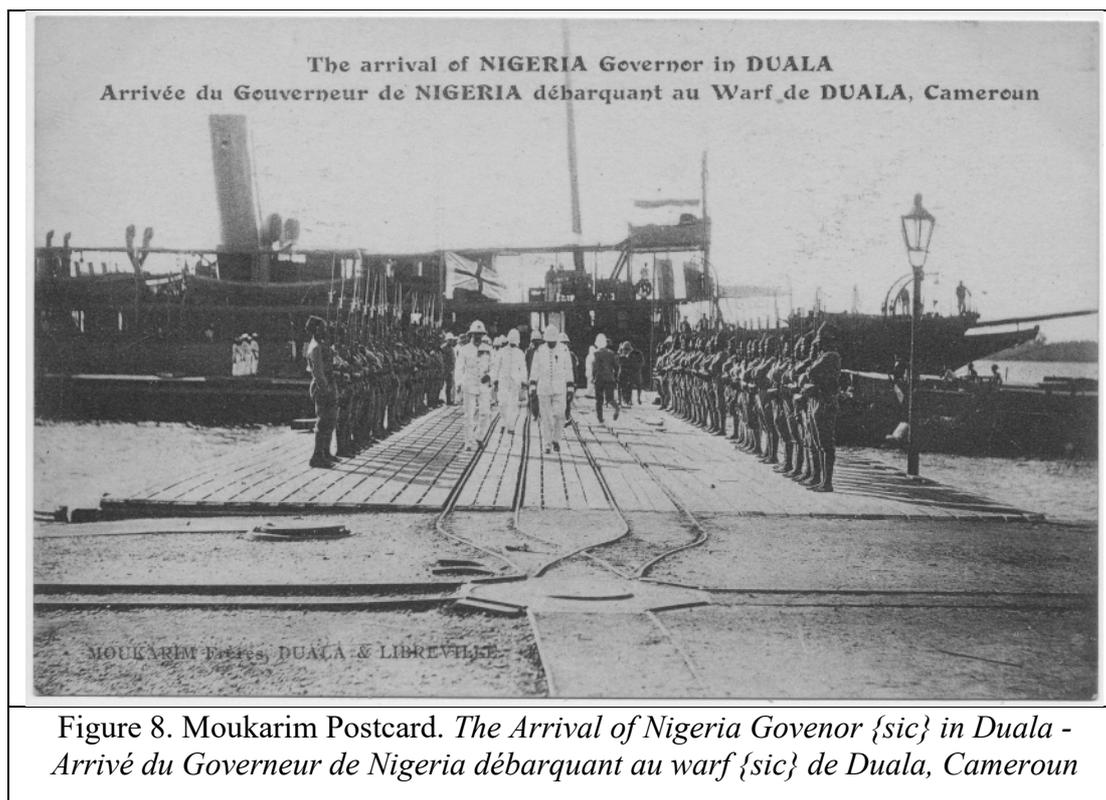


Figure 8. Moukarim Postcard. *The Arrival of Nigeria Governor {sic} in Duala - Arrivé du Gouverneur de Nigeria débarquant au warf {sic} de Duala, Cameroun*

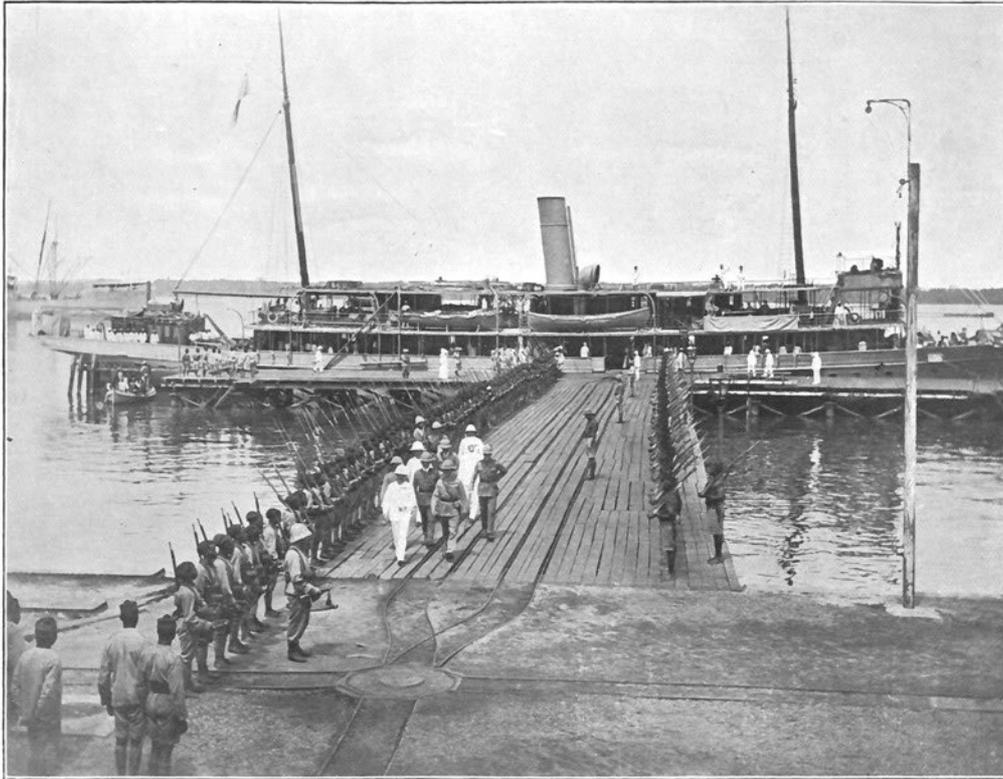
Sir Frederick Lugard's visit to Douala is the one image in the collection that can be dated precisely. Marjorie Perham's biography includes an extract from a letter he wrote to his wife. The letter is dated 24 November 1914 so he arrived a few days before.

At the end of November 1914, he sailed to the Cameroons on the mail boat *Karina*, to inspect the conquered port and the forty miles radius around it which had now been occupied. He sailed into Douala in his own steam yacht, the *Ivy*, which had served in the expedition, through a lane of captured vessels and of British ships of all sizes, with all their crews standing to salute and cheer.

“ Then as I approached the wharf the gun rang out from cruisers and from shore a tremendous salute. Everything was done with the most perfect precision and seamanship, we were alongside the pier and the gangway down in a jiffy and along its whole length was a double guard of honour. French along one side, British on the other.” (L. to F. L., 24 November 1914).

Perham 1956: 538

The visit was a sufficiently significant event for Moukarim not to be the only photographer present. The *Naval Expeditionary Force to the Cameroon 1914-1915* album of photographs includes the following photograph:



H.E. Sir Frederick Lugard landing at Government Wharf, Duala.

Figure 9. Unknown Photographer. *Naval Expeditionary Force to the Cameroon 1914-1915 album p33*

This is taken from a slightly different angle. More interesting still is an image in the archive of the Imperial War Museum, London which has some photographs taken by Commander A W Hughes who was the Captain of the *Ivy*, Lugard's boat. Sadly the image is not of the highest quality even after some digital enhancements.

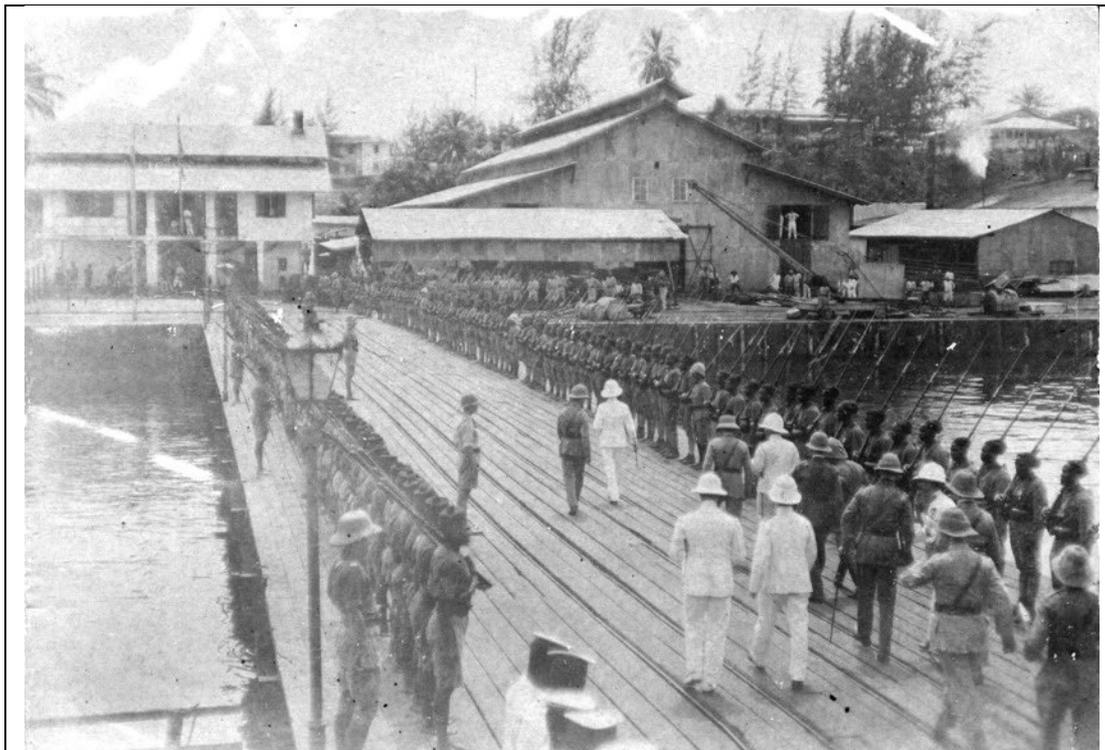


Figure 10. HUGHES (CDR). 'Lugard arriving at Douala' *Catalogue number 2015-05-02* <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/205398323> *Used with permission.*

However this is marked with a definite date: 22/11/14, and as can be seen it shows the building from which the other two photographs were taken. Sadly the low quality of Hughes' photo image lets us down here, but we can make out something:



Figure 11. Hughes. 'Detail of Figure 10 annotated'

I have added arrows pointing to where the Navy photo was taken (on the upper left) and to the black blur that is almost certainly the hood of Moukarim's camera at the end of the wharf.

For images dateable within a fairly narrow range, finally, we should consider this seemingly unpromising looking image:

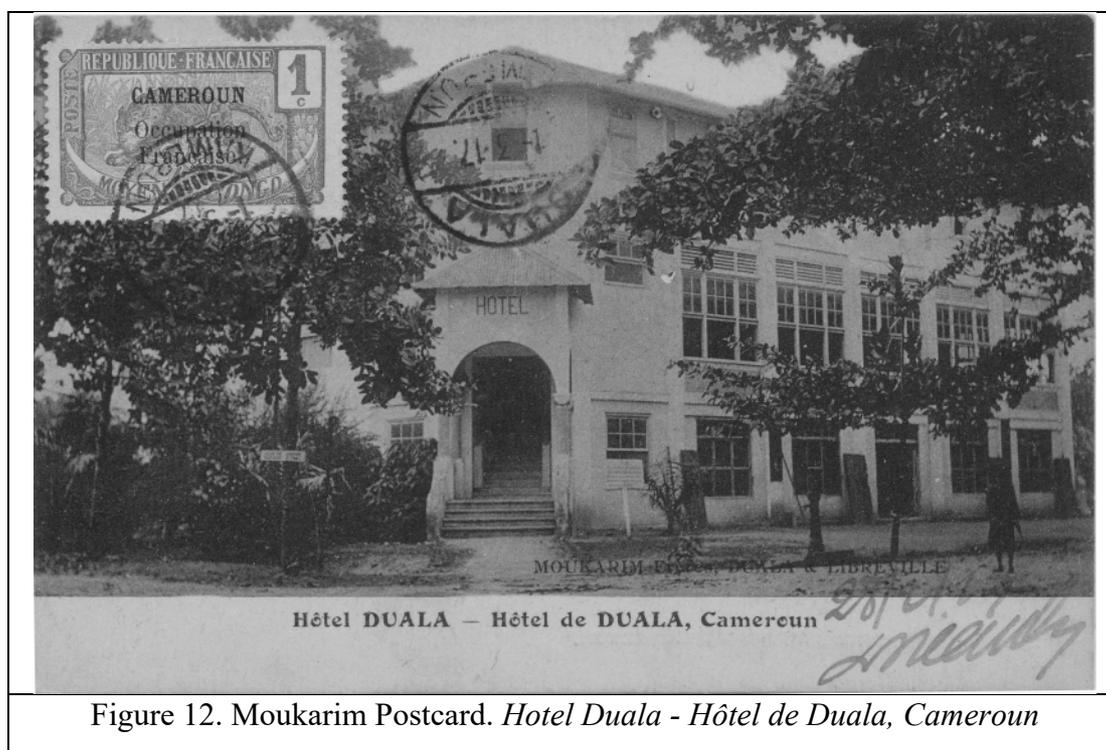


Figure 12. Moukarim Postcard. *Hotel Duala - Hôtel de Duala, Cameroun*

According to Soullillou (1989:106) this building was the German officers mess. It was converted to a hotel after the occupation. Late in 1916 the French army photographer Frédéric Gadmer took an image that shows the same building as Moukarim, captioned the 'Hôtel de France':



Figure 13. Frédéric Gadmer. *Douala. Hôtel de France*. 24 Décembre 1916. Réf. : SPA 93 H 3650. (Also published in Goloubinoff 2013: 13) <https://perma.cc/CQA9-R25M> <https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/502f99f6-2306-41ed-9671-3730f3181494>

© Ministère de la Culture (France), Médiathèque du patrimoine et de la photographie, diffusion RMN-GP

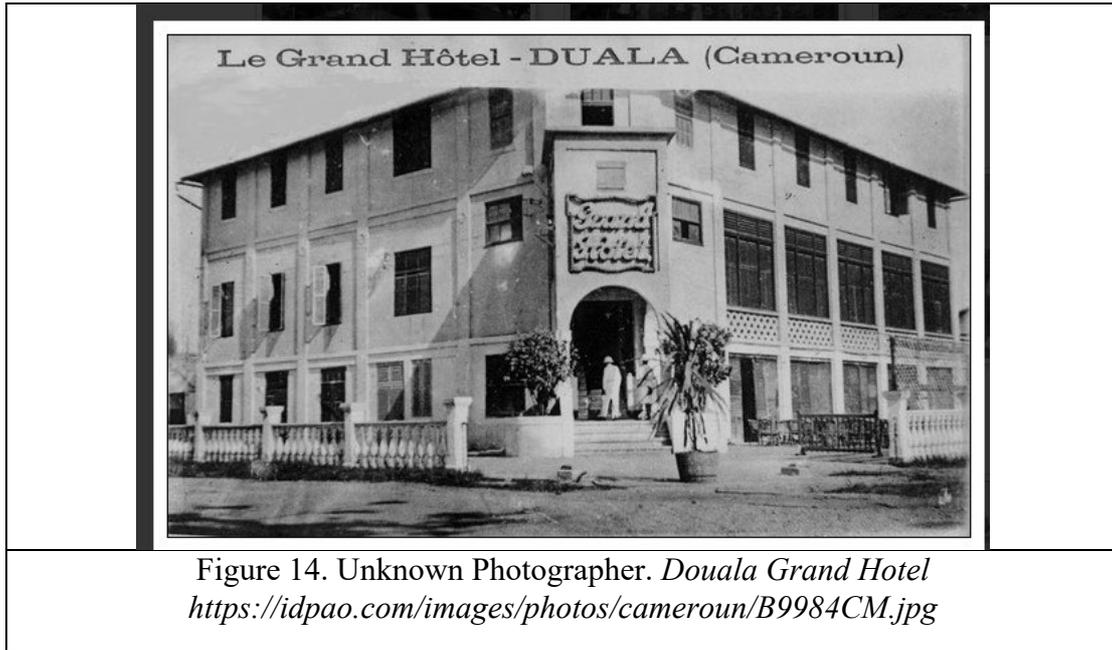
Faintly visible in the Moukarim image is a signboard by the door. The contents of this are legible in Gadmer's image, and significantly it is in French:

Avis.

Par ordre du Générale de Division, Commissaire du Gouvernement tous les Européens débarquant à Duala sont tenus de se présenter aux bureaux de l'Administration Générale dans les deux jours qui suivent leurs arrive à Duala.⁸

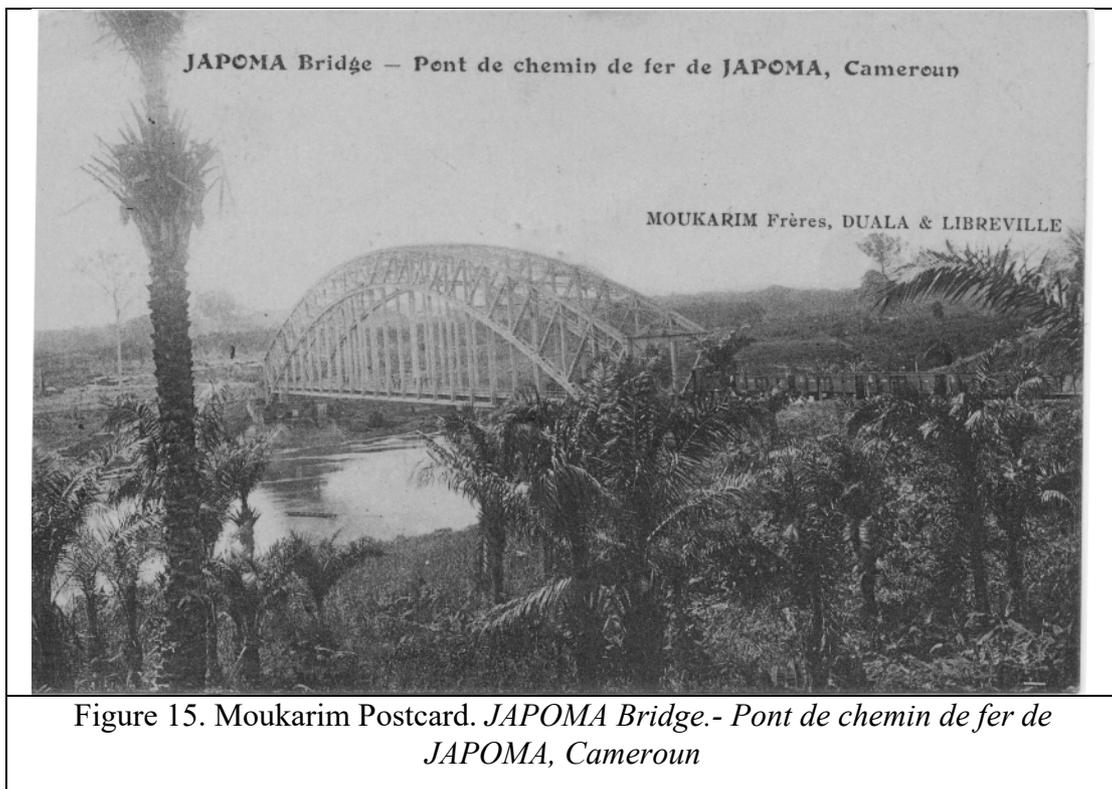
Both these photographs must therefore have been taken after the French occupation of Douala in late 1914 but before 13 July 1917 when the name was changed to the "Grand Hôtel" (Martet 1934: 175). As later photos demonstrate this included changing the name over the front door and removing the signboard so fixing the Moukarim photo to some point in 1915 (since the cards were in circulation by early 1916). (Viallet 2002 has a later postcard showing the hotel terrace in the late 1920s).

⁸ My thanks are due to Veronique Goloubinoff for supplying a copy of the image at high enough resolution to transcribe.



As a postscript we should note that the site was sold to Shell in 1959 and eventually became a filling station (Viallet 2002: 196). Soullilou (1989:106) notes that by the 1980s it had become the site of the BICIC Bank.

Notes on other images

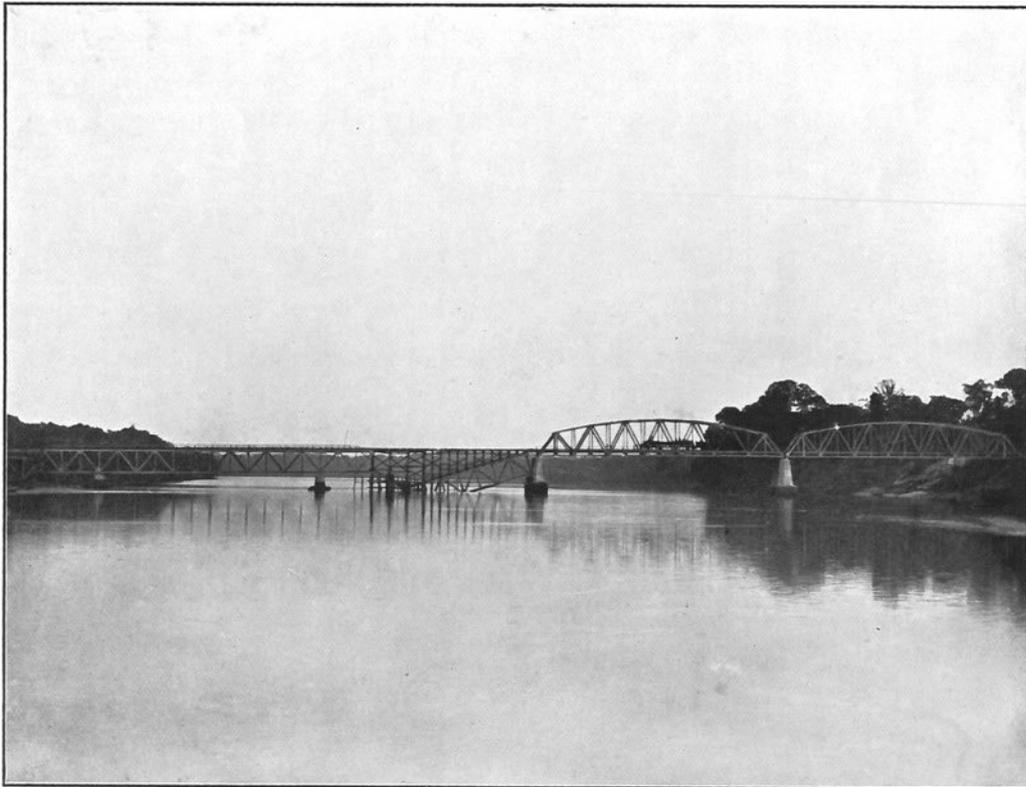


A tale of three bridges. A reader may ask ‘how hard can it be to identify a bridge?’ However, it turns out not to be entirely straightforward. We have to deal with three different bridges in two different places, two of which were damaged during the Cameroons campaign, yet with shared names in captions. Japoma is now an area of greater Douala⁹, but when the photographs were taken it was a place outside Douala where there was an important railway bridge over the river Dibanba. Some transcriptions record it as Yapoma, others as Japoma. Some 50 km away is the city of Edea, part of which is an island in the Sanaga river. For the railway to cross the Sanaga they therefore built two bridges including the so-called Iron Bridge, the Eisenbrücke, built in 1911¹⁰ which at that point was the largest single span bridge in Africa. It was still standing in 2024. Both the (Douala) Japoma bridge and the second Edea bridge were blown up by the Germans¹¹ but the Eisenbrücke was taken unharmed, and indeed when discussing the defence of Edea against counter-attack Gorges says ‘The Sanaga was spanned by a fine steel girder railway bridge which required careful guarding.’ (1920: 198). The Naval Expeditionary Force to the Cameroon photo album shows the repaired Japoma bridge outside Douala. However, the Moukarim postcard (with a misleading caption) shows the Eisenbrücke at Edea.

⁹ A large new football stadium was built near there in 2018 for the Africa Cup of Nations originally planned for 2019 which eventually took place in early 2022.

¹⁰ Dorber Lewis who worked for R.W. King in Edea has a photo of the Eisenbrücke under construction in 1911 <https://dorberhistory.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/eadebridge.jpeg> Note that the web page gives the name as Japoma.

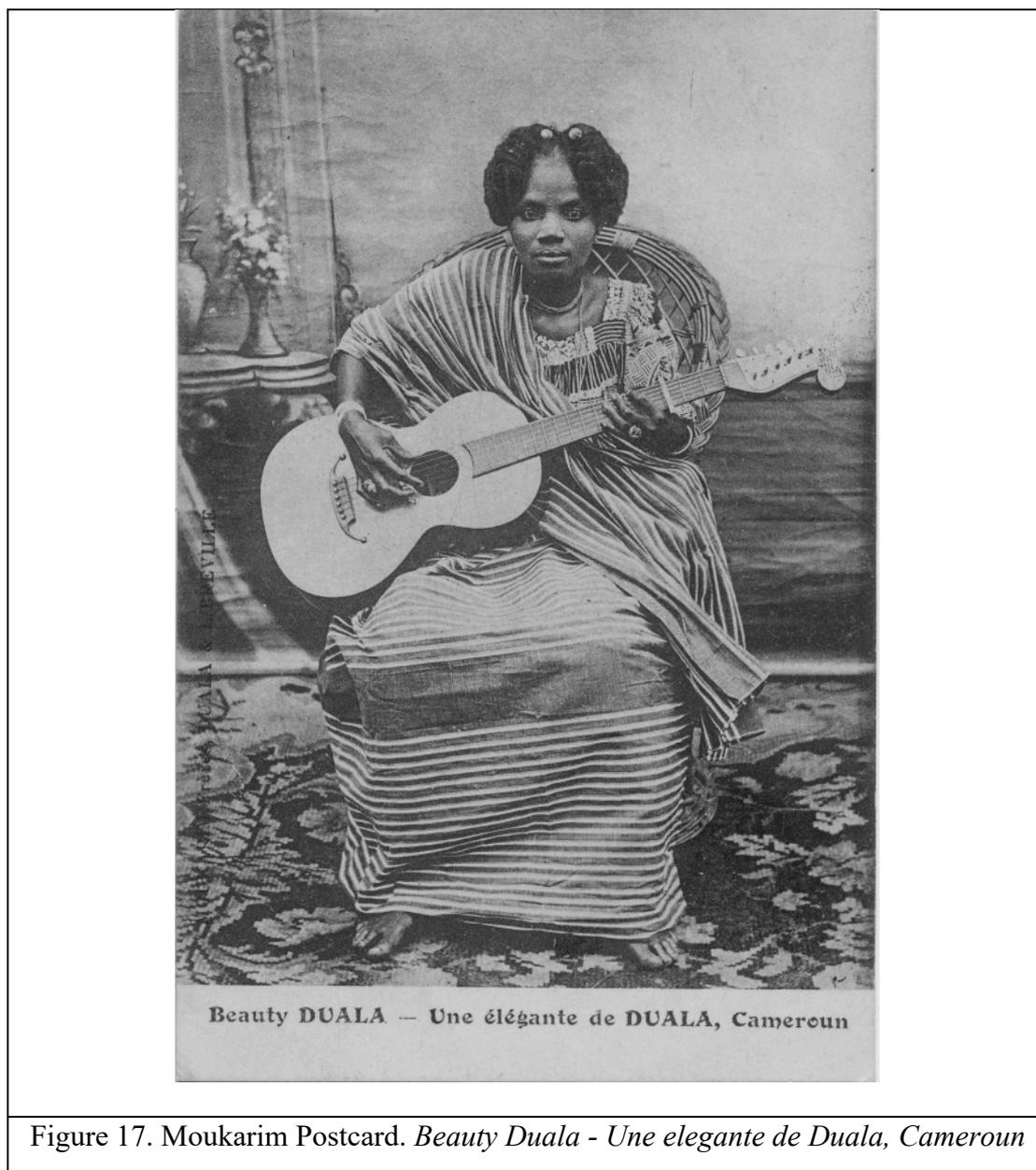
¹¹ According to Reynolds the Japoma bridge was partially destroyed on 6th Oct 1914 (1929 277-9, 278) while Gorges says the Japoma bridge was reported destroyed on 29th Oct 1914 (1920: 152). I infer they are talking about different bridges: first the Japoma bridge outside Douala, then later, one of the bridges at Edea!



Showing the repairs made to Japoma Bridge.

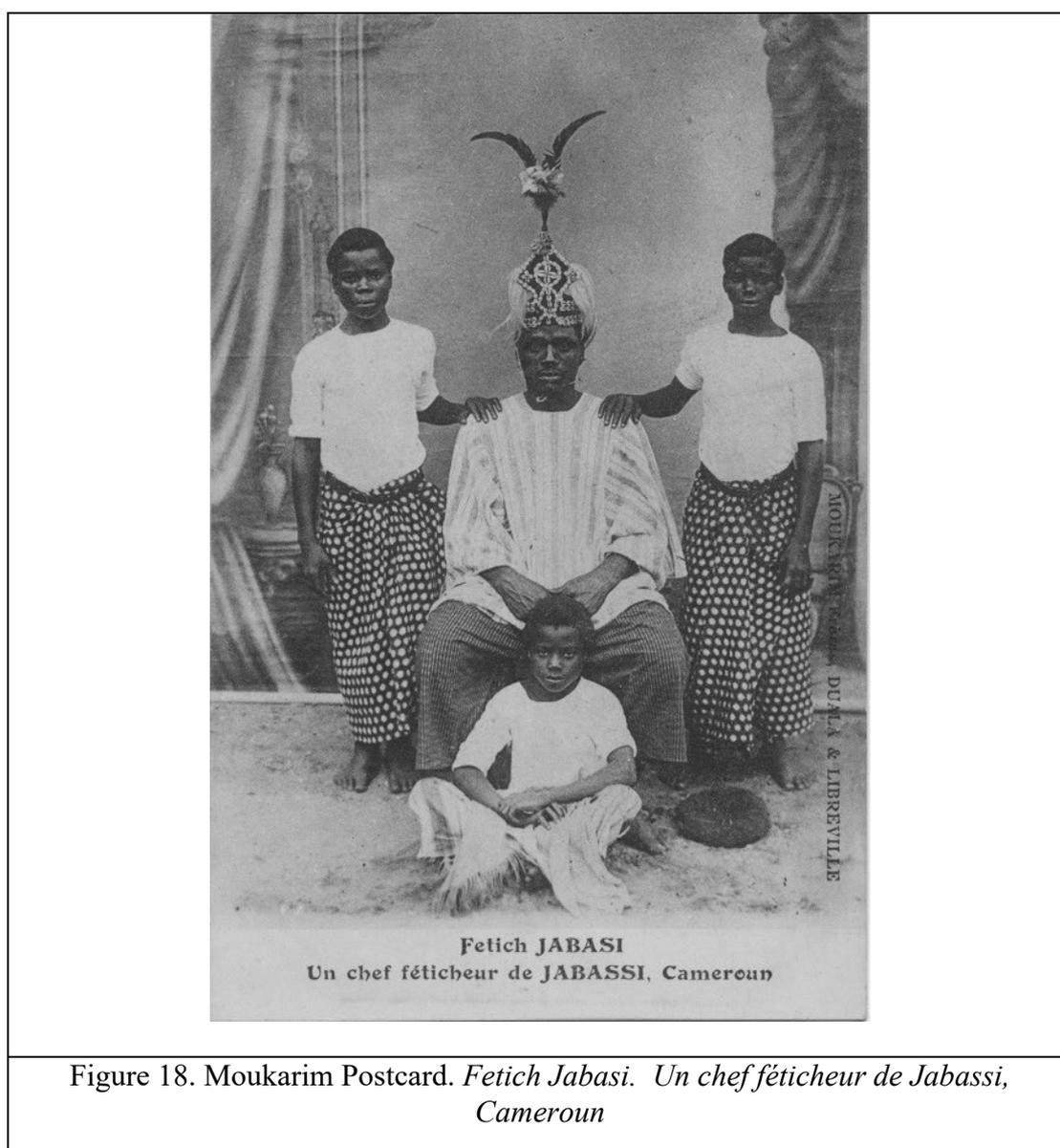
Figure 16. Unknown Photographer. *The repaired Japoma bridge outside Douala. The Naval Expeditionary Force to the Cameroon (no date) photo album.*

Two studio images



It seems clear that this is a studio portrait, and the European-style guitar may well have been a studio prop. This image shares a backdrop with the postcard described as ‘Jabasi fetich’. The shared backdrop suggests several possible scenarios for these two images. They may both have been taken in a studio in Douala or in Jabassi (now known as Yabassi) – this is far less likely given the size of Yabassi at the time. Alternatively, the backdrop could have been taken with the photographer to Yabassi. This remains a possibility since the *Jabasi fetich* image does not show the carpet visible in the *Duala Beauty* image, and there is another picture from Yabassi market. It is equally possible that both were taken in a studio in Douala, the so-called *féticheur* being an itinerant

healer, plying his trade in Douala. In this case the original photograph may then have been commissioned by the healer as an advert. Since there are no other Moukarim photos that were obviously taken in a studio we must further acknowledge the possibility that these images originated in the studio of a different photographer. This was a not uncommon practice among West African photographers at the time.¹²



As already discussed this has the same backdrop as was used in *Duala Beauty* image. There is some orthographic confusion between Jabasi and Jabassi in the captions which I take to be referring to the Bassa town of Yabassi. We should note the prominent

¹² For example, Fortier's postcard imprint in Senegal is notorious for including images taken by many different photographers (see Hickling 2007).

position of what appear to be two identically dressed non-identical twins on either side of him. There is what might be a cap on the floor at the feet of the righthand-side twin. Although I have asked many people about this image so far I have not been able to elicit much further information. In the literature on Bassa ritual and tradition there is mention of priests with feathered hats (Wognon 2010 : 85) and of healers with pointed hats (Hourantier et al 1979: 22). I note that the Unilever archives contain a photo captioned “Sanaga Edea fetich dancer” showing a similar hat.

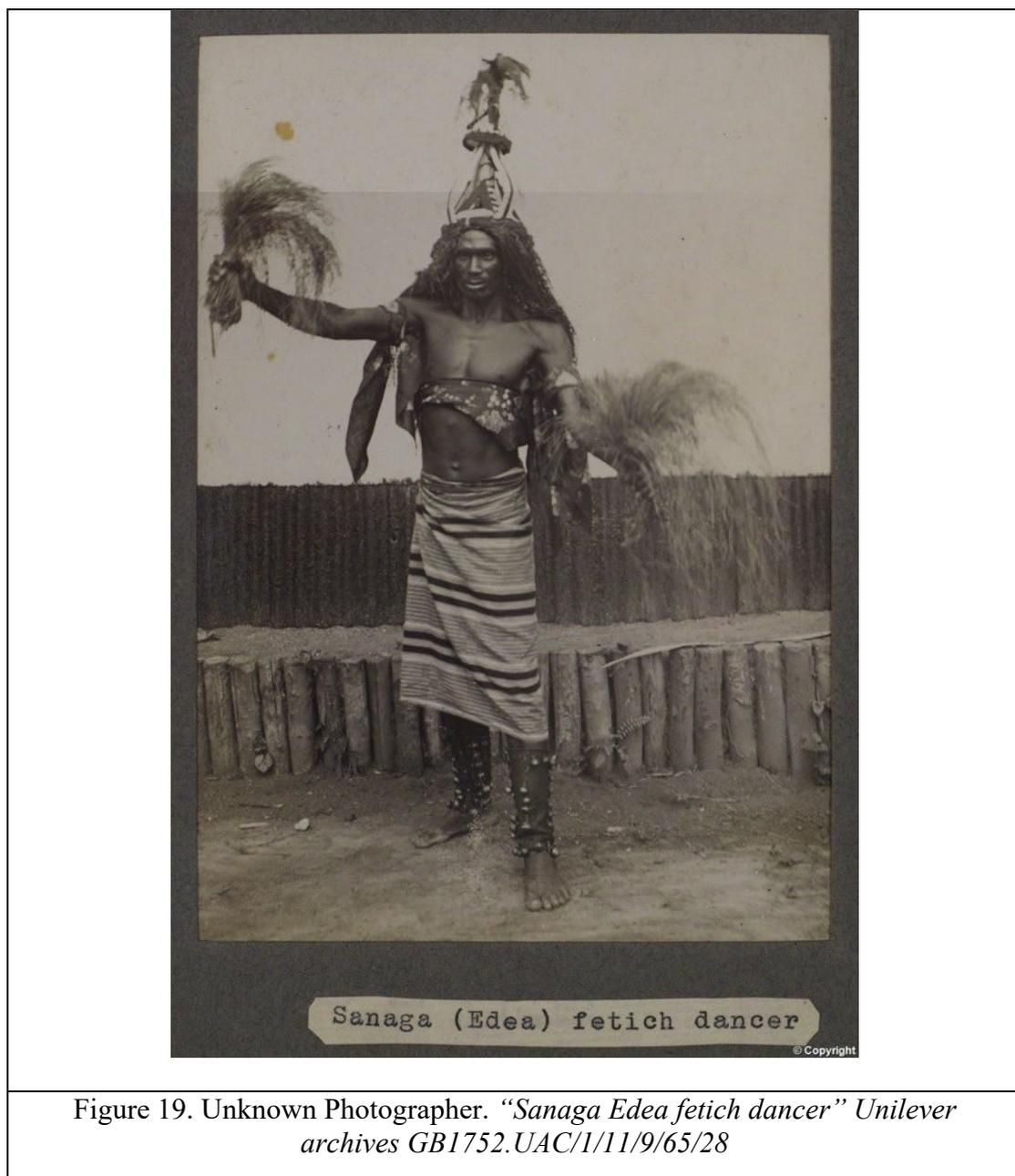
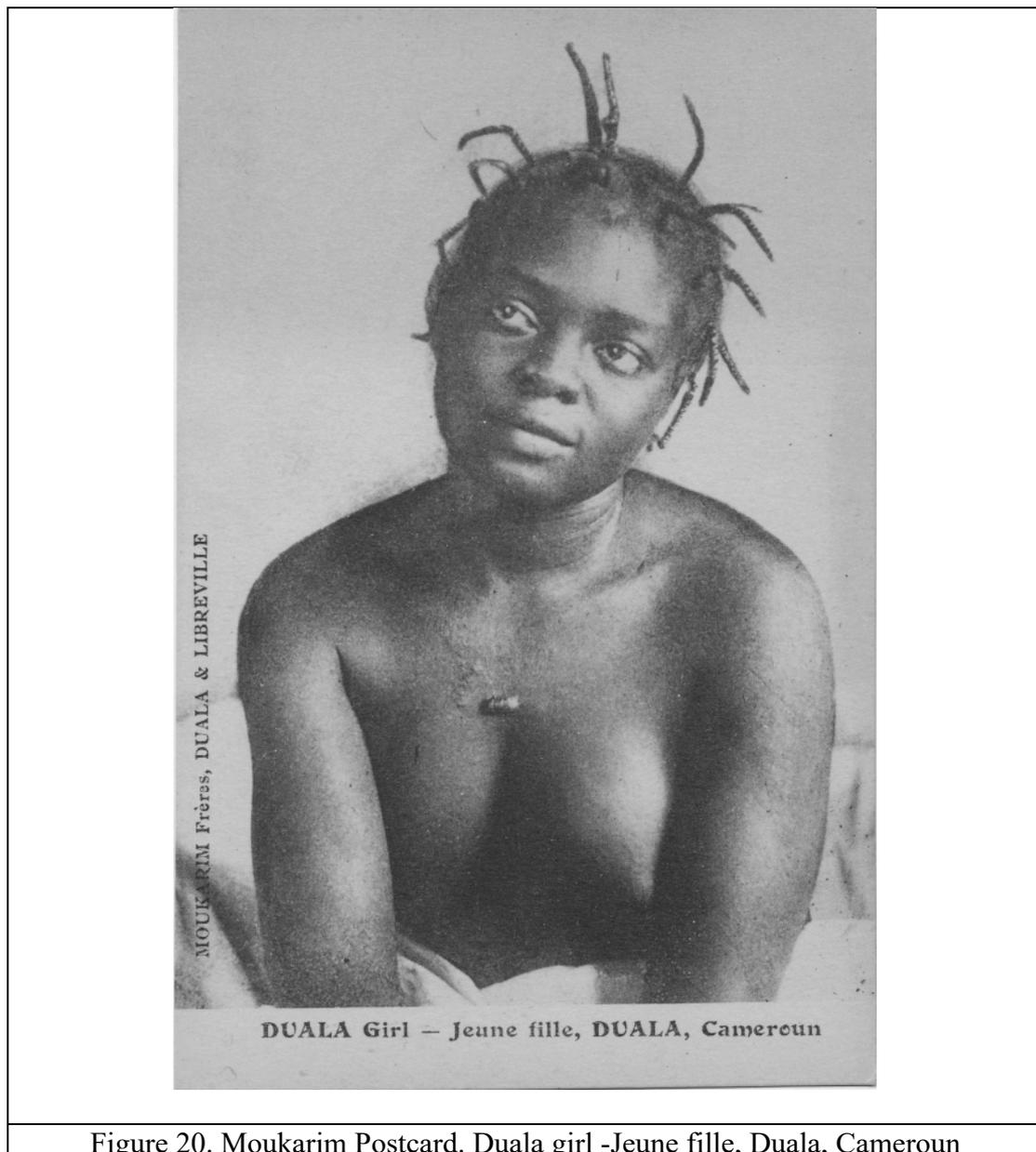


Figure 19. Unknown Photographer. “*Sanaga Edea fetich dancer*” Unilever archives GB1752.UAC/1/11/9/65/28

Images from Douala



This contrasts (somewhat) with the Beauty Duala image above Figure 17. It is unclear whether there is a painted backdrop. Not only are the hair styles very different but the way her gaze is so clearly to her right makes this feel much more informal.

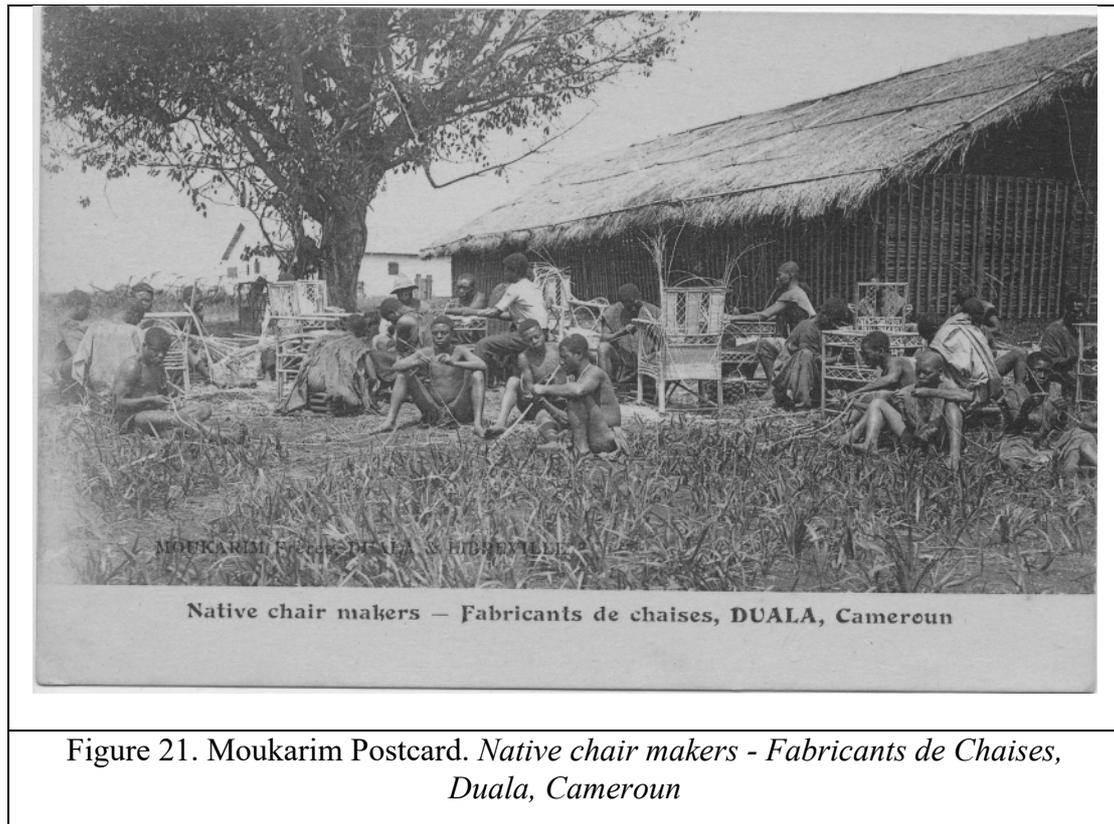


Figure 21. Moukarim Postcard. *Native chair makers - Fabricants de Chaises, Duala, Cameroun*

This probably shows the output of a missionary craft enterprise: there is what looks like a church or mission building in the background. Moreover, the chair styles suggest European influence. The Basel Mission carpenters workshops are well documented but nothing is said about rattan chairs such as those shown. Many contemporary missionary organisations had similar craft workshops as demonstrated by a postcard from the Frank James Industrial School in Elat, Cameroon (dating from the 1920s) which does show similar rattan chairs.



Figure 22. Unknown Photographer. *Exhibit of Work of the Frank James Industrial School, Elat, West Africa*



Figure 23. Moukarim Postcard. *Native King's Palace - Palais du Roi Indigène, Duala, Cameroun*

This is the much photographed and much discussed palace (known as the Pagoda/Pagode) of King August Manga Ndumbe Bell, built in 1905, now the location of the Doual'art centre (which was started by a member of the Bell family).¹³ It forms the backdrop to Figure 2 above and is Building 3 on Soullillou's map of central Douala (1989: 82).



Figure 24. Yves Makongo. *Doual'art centre in 2013*

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Vue_de_face_Palais_des_Rois_Bell.jpg
28 September 2013. Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.)

¹³ For *Doual'art* see <http://www.doualart.org/> . For the Pagoda itself see discussion and other references in Viallet 2002: 146-153, Osayimwese 2008: 62 and Doti 2020: 3.10, as well as online material e.g. <http://cameroun.unblog.fr/2011/06/18/la-pagode-de-douala/> and https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palace_of_King_Bell . There are also early Basel Mission photos of the structure:
<http://www.bmarchives.org/browse/#cs=%26duala%26palace%26%26douala&tf=1740&t=I>
http://cameroon_pics.voila.net/vivre/douala_31.html

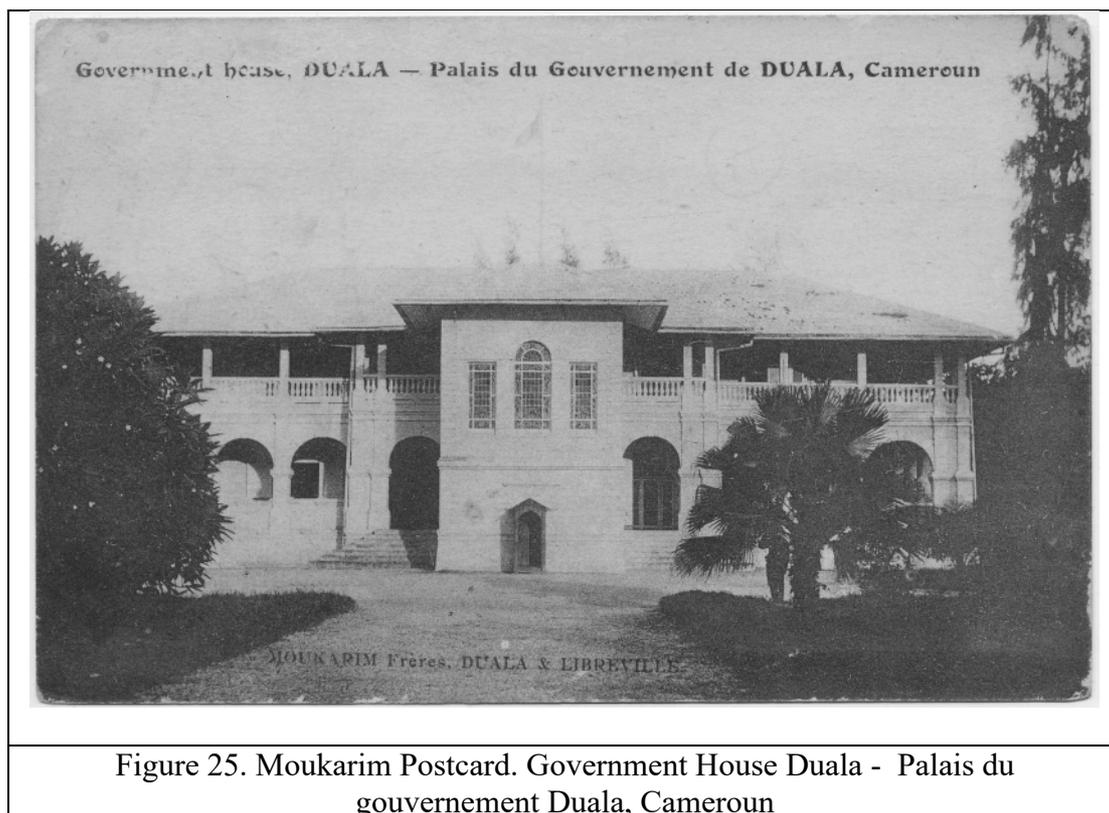


Figure 25. Moukarim Postcard. Government House Duala - Palais du gouvernement Duala, Cameroun

Soulillou (1989: 97 middle) gives another view of this building. His caption is: ‘The governor’s palace during the French Mandate: it occupies the same site as the former German governor’s palace (see map of 1890)’. It is also shown in Gorges 1920: 144 and Viallet 2002: 156-7. Another nearby building that still stands has a very similar name (Government House) as seen in Wikimedia (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Le_QG_allemand.jpg) and in Sobseh and Takor (2022: 7 Fig 5). Another early postcard gives a clarifying French title for the neighbouring building ‘Administration Générale’ (see Viallet 2002: 171). Moukarim photographed the residence of the Governor, the other building was his office.

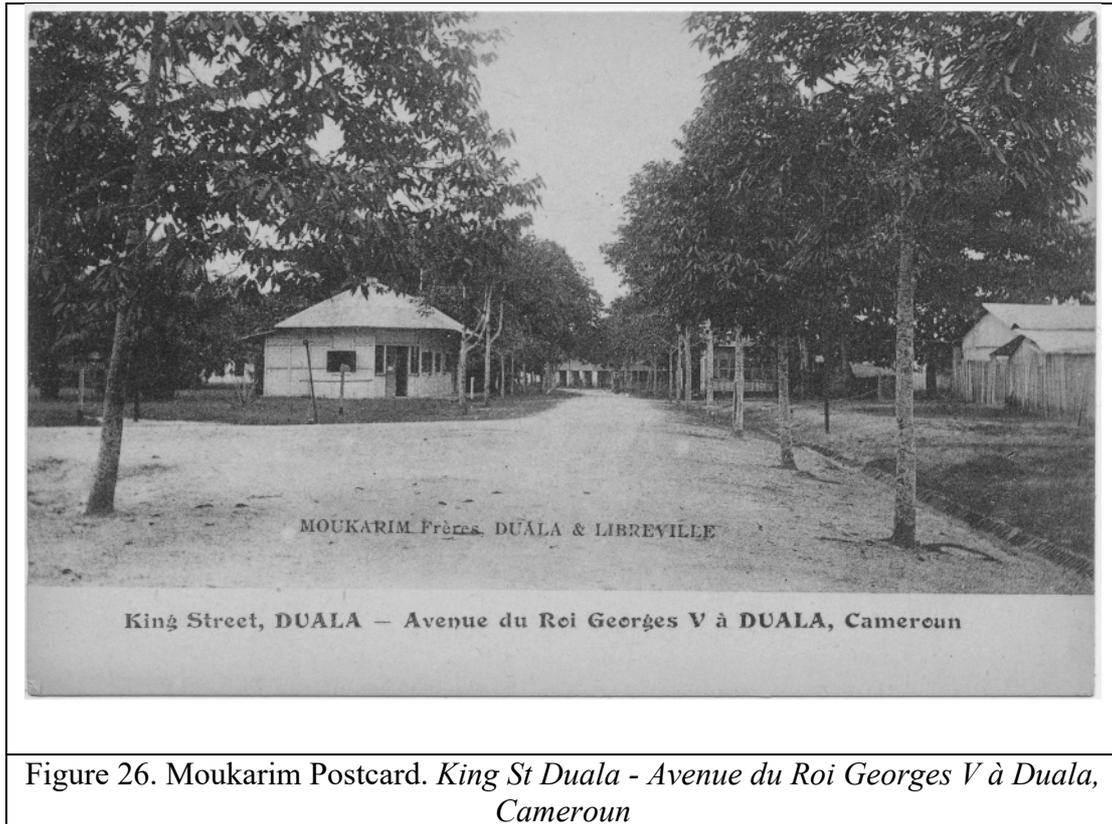


Figure 26. Moukarim Postcard. *King St Duala - Avenue du Roi Georges V à Duala, Cameroun*

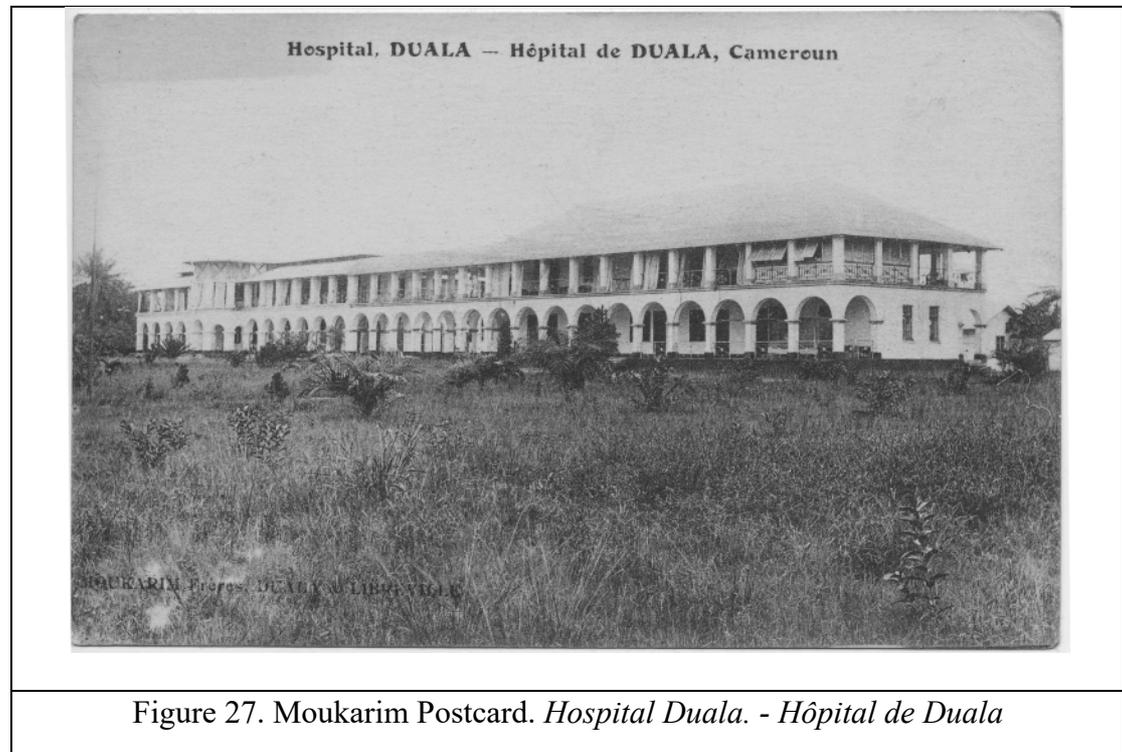
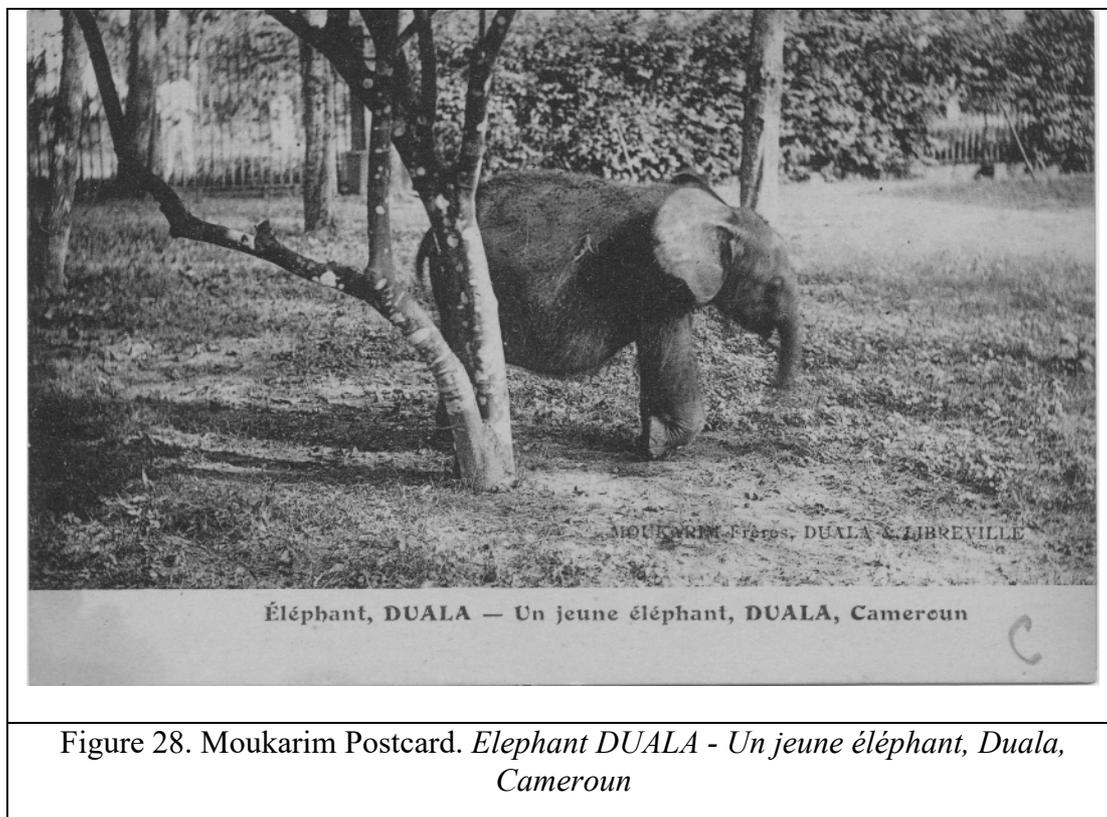


Figure 27. Moukarim Postcard. *Hospital Duala. - Hôpital de Duala*

This shows the *European Hospital* at Douala (see also Soullillou 1989: 32). Its construction and subsequent history is discussed by Zourmba (2019: 59-60) and Doti (2020: 3.10). This was also photographed in late 1916 by Frédéric Gadmer from a similar angle.¹⁴



This appears to be an African forest elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*). Since it is described as young it is impossible to determine its sex from the absence of tusks. Officially there was no zoo in Douala at this period (there was one at nearby Victoria/Limbe – as part of the botanical gardens). However, a near contemporaneous account from 1916 records that ‘there was a “Zoo” in the hospital grounds in Duala, consisting of three or four duiker and other buck’ (Anon 1916: 405-6). This suggests that this image may have been taken together with the preceding image of the hospital.

¹⁴ <https://imagesdefense.gouv.fr/fr/douala-l-hopital-europeen-legende-d-origine.html> .



Figure 31 Moukarim Postcard. *Duala Marina III - Marina Duala, Cameroun*



Figure 32 Moukarim Postcard. *Duala Marina IV - Marina Duala, Cameroun*

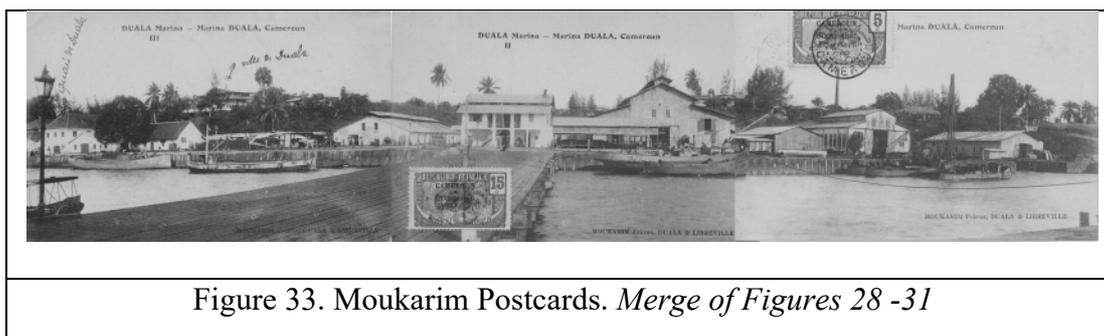


Figure 33. Moukarim Postcards. *Merge of Figures 28 -31*

Three of the images showing the sea front were taken from the same spot on the Government wharf as can be seen from the merged version. (This wharf is prominent in the Governor Nigeria photograph (Figure 8) which was taken from the building seen above the stamp in Marina II at the shore end of the Government wharf). The image for Marina IV was taken from a slightly different position on the wharf so it does not join with the other three. It shows the tree and barge that appear on Marina III but since the planks of the wharf itself are not visible in the foreground it seems that camera has been moved to the left hand side of the wharf (looking towards the shore).

The image Marina III has another significance. The handwritten text on an undated and unfranked instance of this image notes that the ‘factorie’ (shop/warehouse) of the ‘Syrene Moukarim’ is visible behind the tree centre left in the image below. ‘At the bottom left is a French factorie of a man from Bordeaux and the small one next to it is a factorie of the Syrian¹⁵ Moukarim’.

¹⁵ The French *Syrene* or *Syrien* was then used to refer people from what we now call Lebanon. The term was also used in other Anglophone areas: Monsour reports the same usage for Lebanese people in Australia at the same period (2017: 13).



Figure 28. Moukarim Postcard. *Duala Marina: III detail showing the Moukarim "factorie"*



Figure 29. Moukarim Postcard. *Duala Marina V - Marina Duala, Cameroun*

This appears without credit in Soulillou (1989: 37). His caption reads ‘Above the quays of Joss, at the right centre the building of the Woerman Line. At the far left one can see the buildings of the Basel Mission.’¹⁶

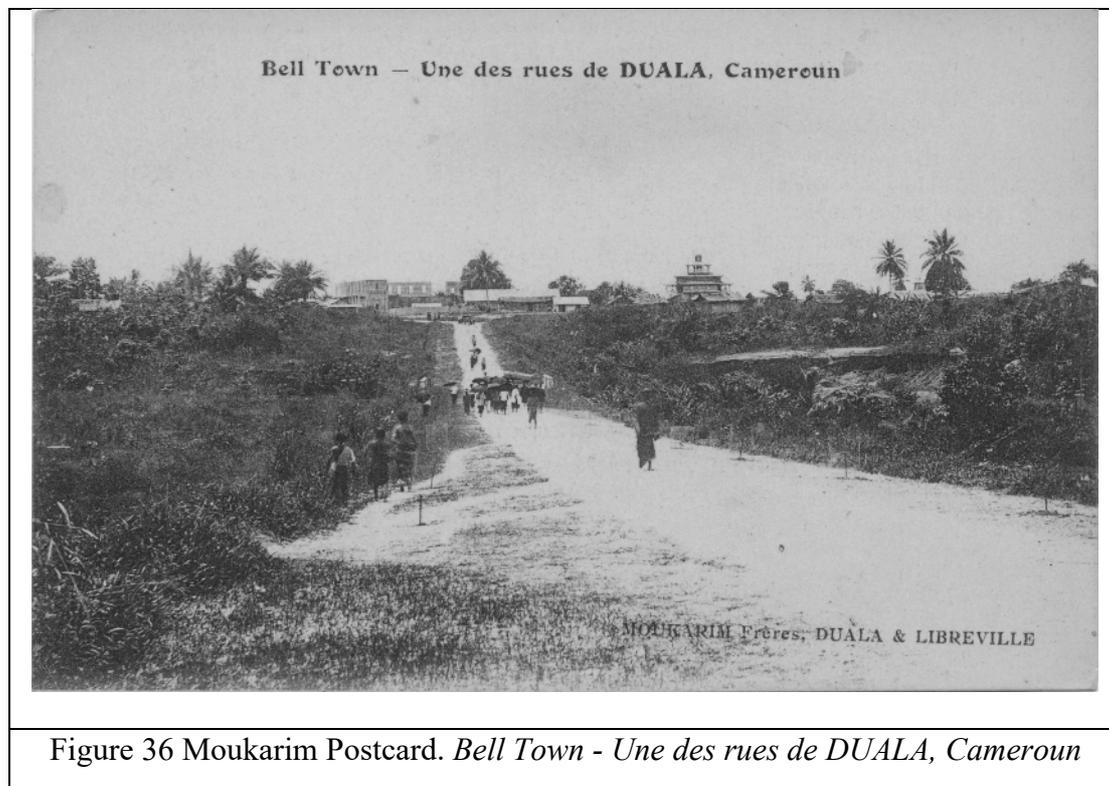
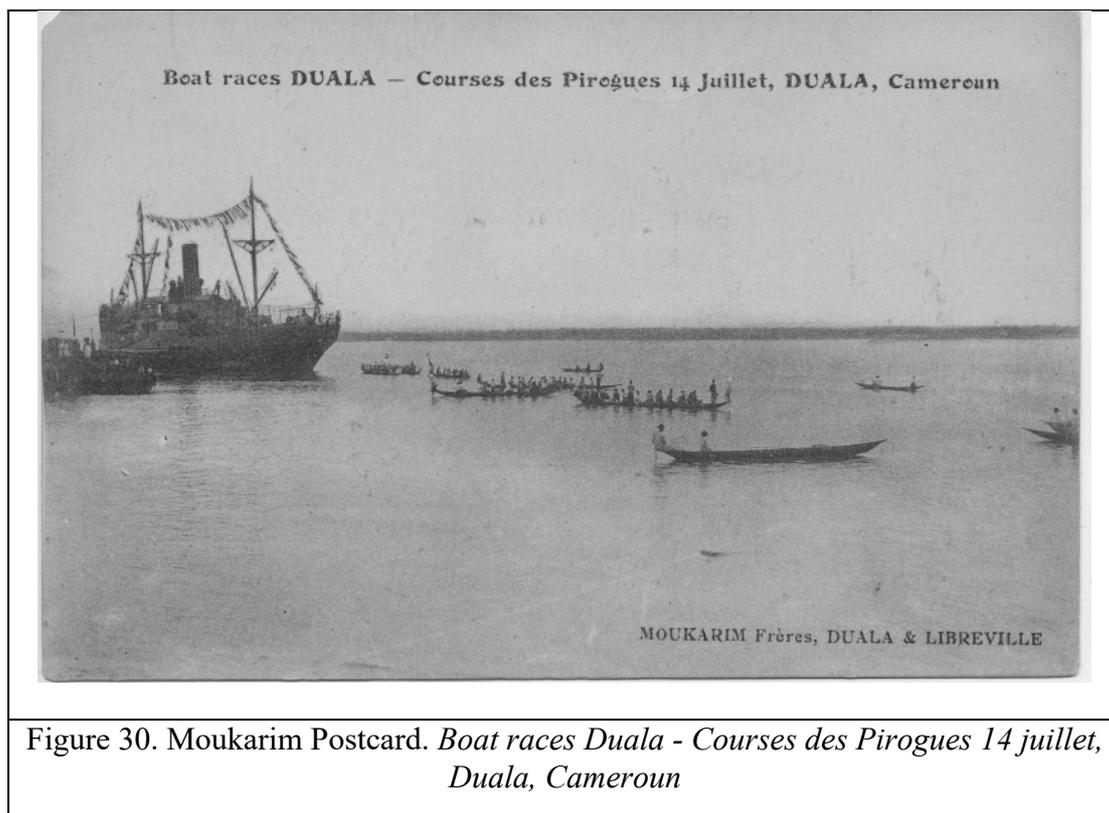


Figure 36 Moukarim Postcard. *Bell Town - Une des rues de DUALA, Cameroun*

Soulillou (1989: 48 bottom) has a different image but taken from almost the same spot (judging by the location of the Pagoda). His caption is ‘The road joining Akwa to Joss seen from Akwa. At the back centre the Pagoda is visible.’ This illustrates clearly how the Douala of this period was a loose network of different villages (named after their ruling families e.g. Joss, Akwa, Bell) with considerable space in between them.

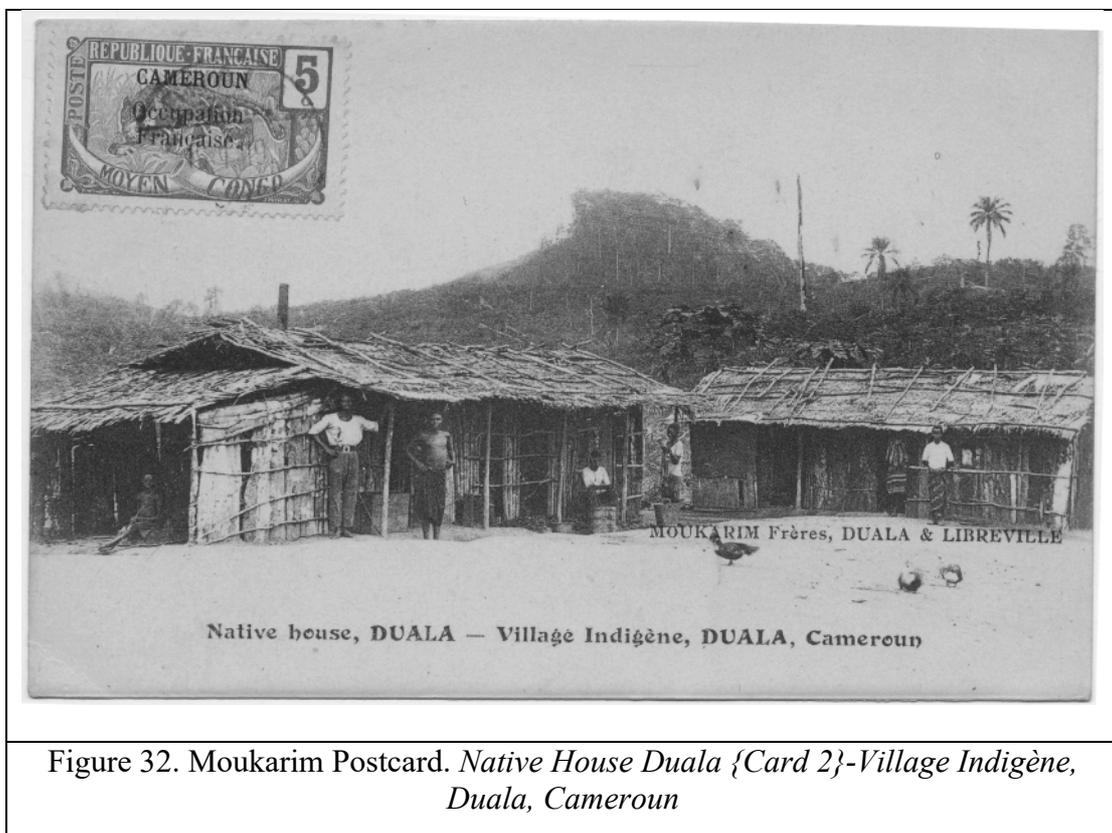
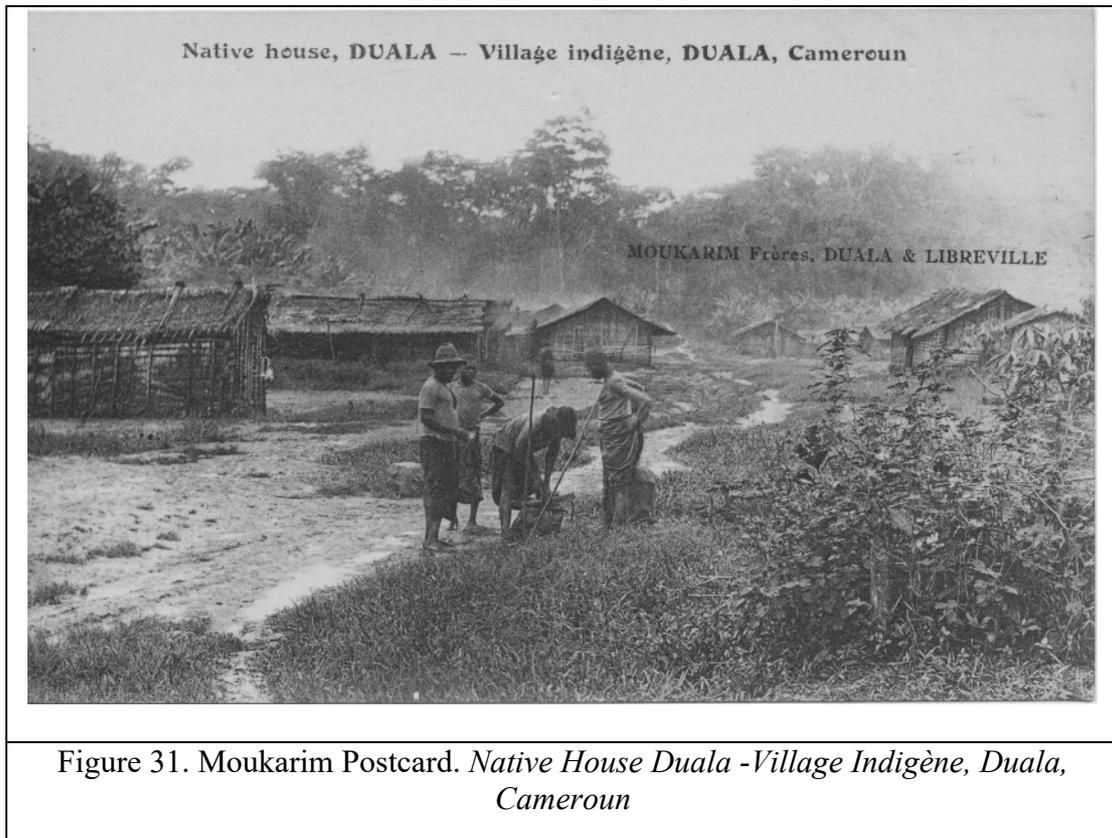
¹⁶ Some archival documents about the Douala port are held in the French overseas archives in Aix-en-Provence reflecting the economic importance of the port after WW1, see: <http://anom.archivesnationales.culture.gouv.fr/ark:/61561/wi598ys00yl>.



The 14 July was celebrated by the Germans as the anniversary of the formal annexation of the territory for the Imperial German Crown by Gustav Nachtigal on 14 July 1884 (Amougou 2010: 171-172 and Wilcox 1994: 76) after a treaty was signed by German traders and senior Cameroonians from Douala on 12 July 1884 (Simo 2005: 100). These sorts of boat races were already established before 1884 (Wilcox 1994: 85ff). Barbara Wilcox speculates (1994: 86) that the origin of the racing was both to be first to reach trade vessels moored offshore (so parallel to the origins of pilot gig racing in contemporary Cornwall, UK) and then to be first to bring goods in to shore from those vessels.

Whatever their origins, by mid-nineteenth century, and continuing to date, large elaborately carved canoes were raced and displayed by different communities around the Douala area. Having considered their role as part of the status and prestige of the elite (and rival) families Wilcox continues: ‘After colonization, racing activities were transformed into functions that suited governmental policy. Racing events were held at celebrations marking the national holidays of the colonizing European nation: the Kaiser’s birthday, Empire Day, Bastille Day and Armistice Day’ (1994: 90 see also Austen and Derrick 1999: 171 and Harter 1960). This explains why the tradition of racing continued after WW1 although under the French administration there was an

ambiguity about celebrations occurring on 14 July. This could be viewed as either a politically loaded reference back to German colonisation or the marking of Bastille day!



The final two images from Douala could have been taken anywhere in south Cameroon. They show houses with palm rib roofs. The first has a group of men probably preparing to go and work in the fields, for as well as showing spears, a hoe is visible resting on the bundle being prepared on the ground. The puddles and the steam rising from the house on the right hand side suggest it was taken relatively early in the morning during the rainy season. The second card shows domestic birds, either ducks or chickens, as well as several people. The seated man in the white shirt in the centre may be using a hand operated sewing machine.

Images from outside Douala

The following images are included for completeness.

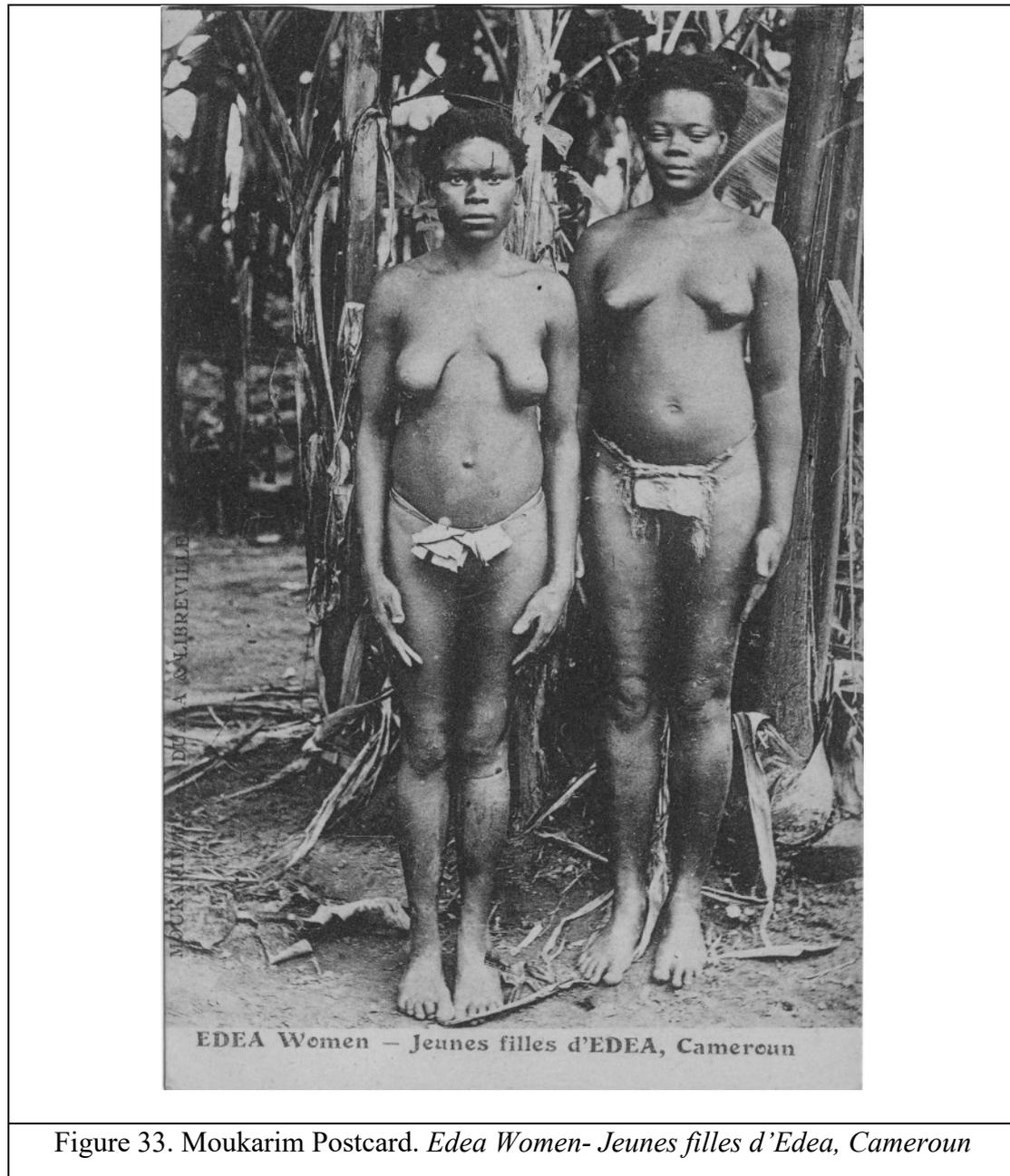


Figure 33. Moukarim Postcard. *Edea Women- Jeunes filles d'Edea, Cameroun*

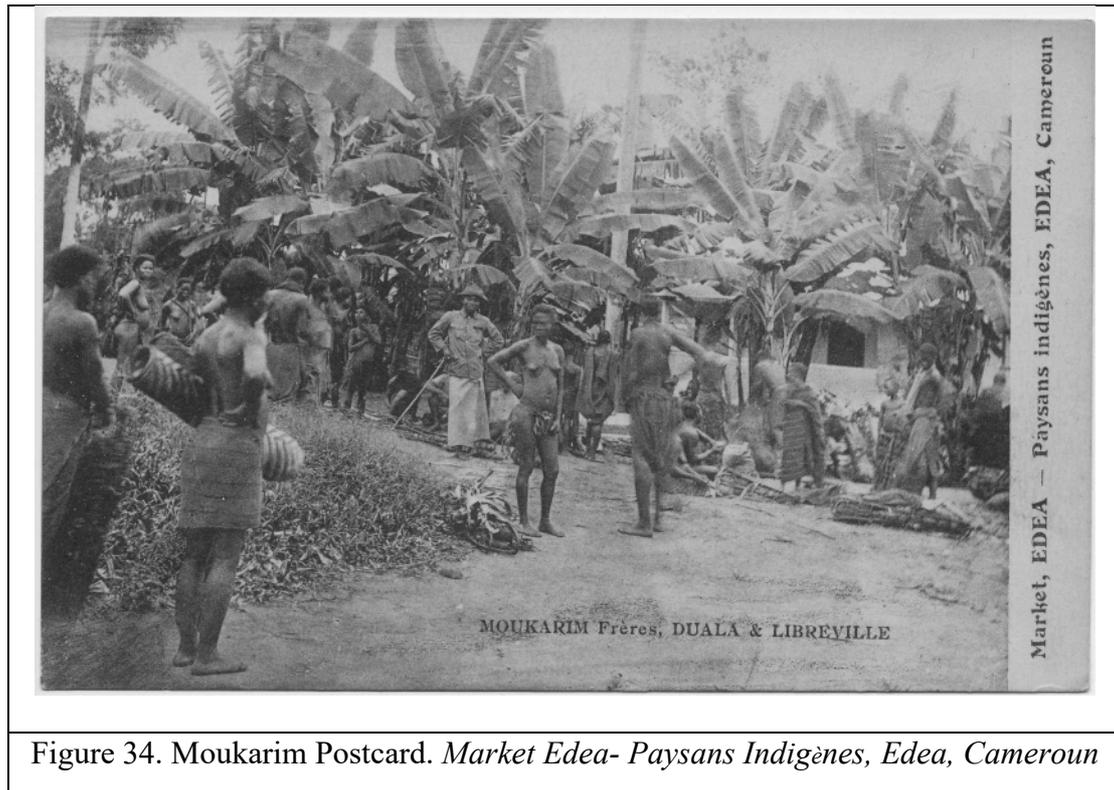


Figure 34. Moukarim Postcard. *Market Edea- Paysans Indigènes, Edea, Cameroun*

These two highly conventional images of nearly naked women show particular disparities in the English and French captions: more than just a translation issue of whether *Jeunes filles* should be translated as *Young women* or *girls*, only the English text of the caption for the second image mentions the market. The French caption has *Indigenous Peasants* or *Farmers*. This could reflect the way that there is far less obvious market activity visible in the scene than in the scene from Jabassi market that follows, more emphasis is on the semi-naked women. Behind the bananas some white painted walls are visible, suggesting a large building, so this seems to be the edge of the market place rather than its centre.

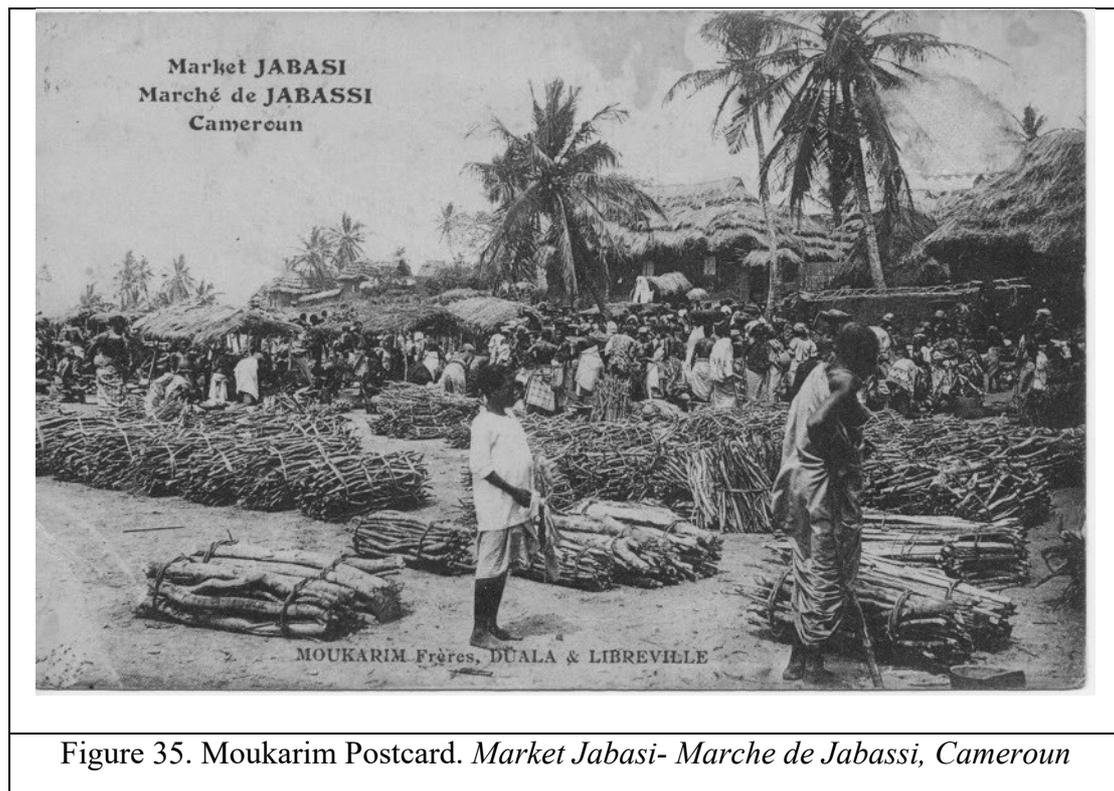
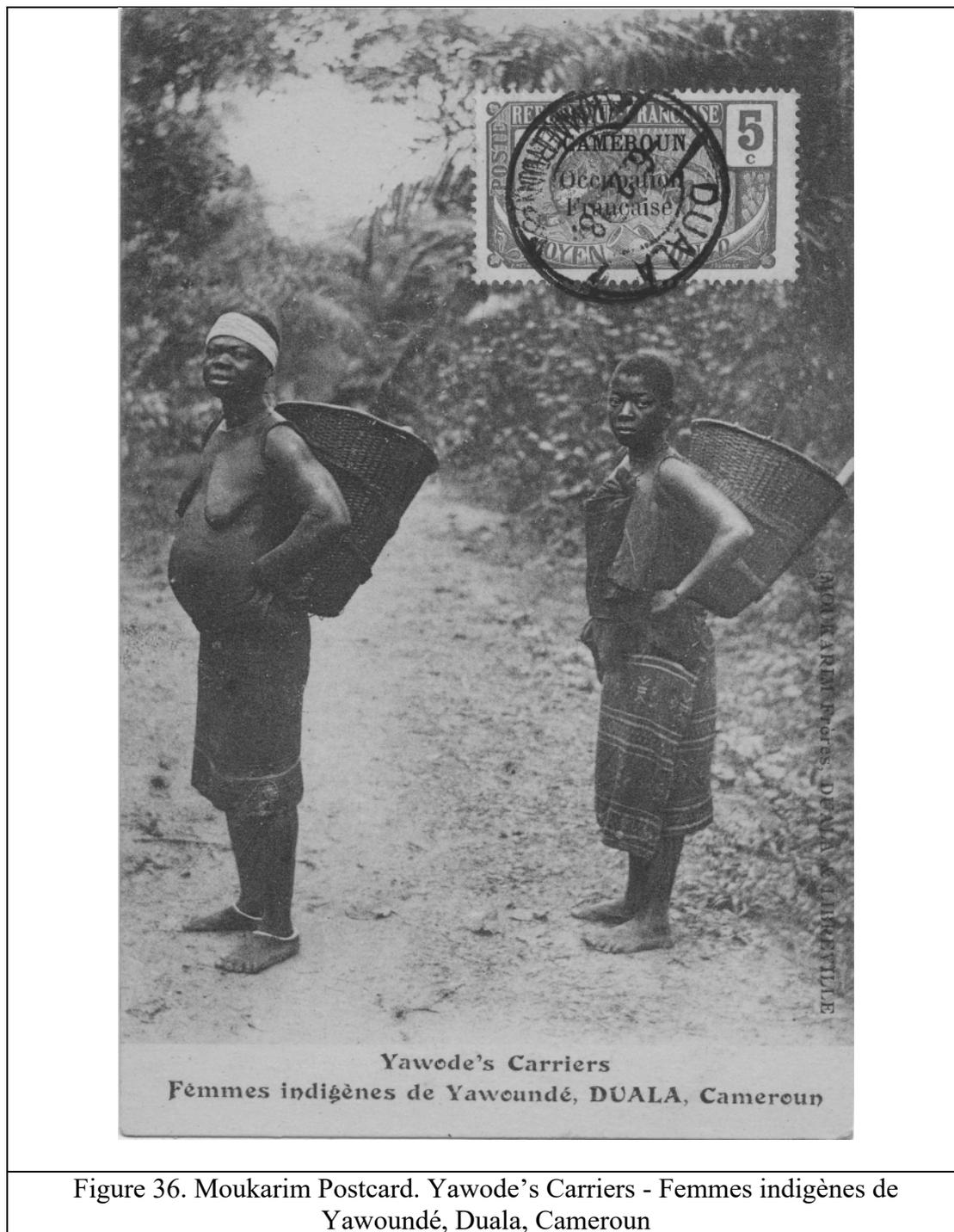


Figure 35. Moukarim Postcard. *Market Jabasi- Marche de Jabassi, Cameroun*

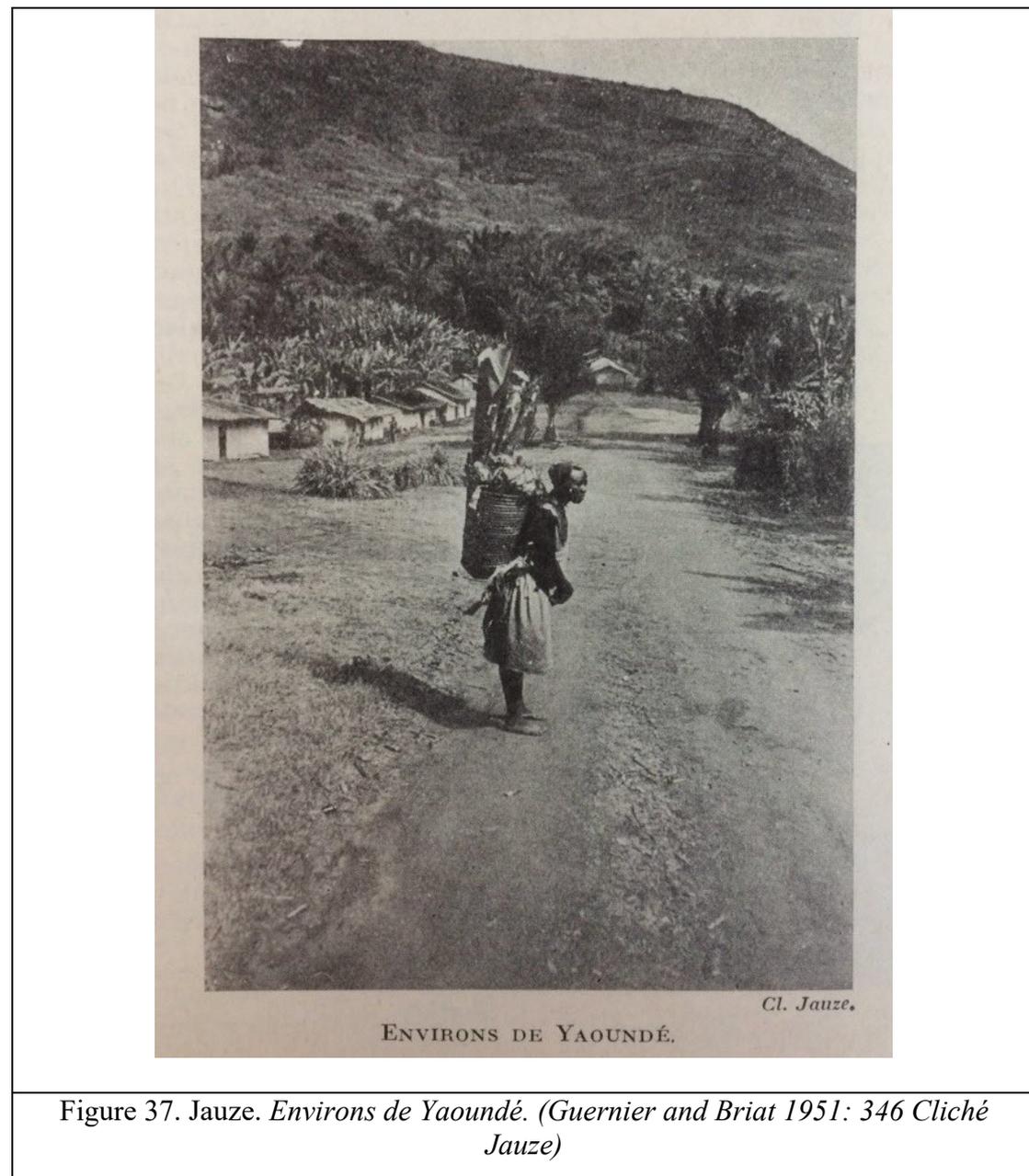
Bundles of firewood are stacked for sale, behind which many women are bending over to buy and sell produce. It is not obvious what the two foreground figures are doing. They may simply have been asked to stand still while the shot was taken.



I suspect this card to have been taken near Yaoundé and that this card demonstrates that the captions were not proofed. Since they were produced during a world war at a remove of several thousand kilometres this is not surprising. In this case the French caption confuses places which a typo in the English translation exacerbates. I believe the French caption should be *Femmes indigènes de Yaoundé*, and the English caption, paralleling the disconnected style of the original should therefore read *Carriers of Yaoundé*. The

confusing inclusion of Duala is very likely to have been a transposition from other captions by the printer.

Part of the evidence for this comes from an illustration in the 1951 Cameroun-Togo volume of the *Encyclopédie de l'Afrique française* showing a very similar style of similar basket in a photograph taken near Yaoundé.



If this is correct then it raises a question about when the photograph was taken. Yaoundé only fell to British troops on 1 January 1916 (Quinn 2006: 75). Since the postcards were being sold and sent by February 1916 there was clearly not time for peace to be

established in the hinterland sufficient for Moukarim to go to Yaoundé take the photograph, return to Douala and then send it off to Paris for printing with the others. Much more likely it had been taken before the outbreak of hostilities (so before August 1914) and was included in the batch sent to Paris for printing by late 1915 since, as already noted, we know they were being posted in Douala early in 1916.

A history of photographers

Having considered the images what can we say about the photographers? Some information is available online and members of the family live in Gabon although no Moukarim family members remain in Cameroon. As far as I can establish it, the story is this.

The Moukarims are a family originating in the Lebanese village of Ras El Matn.¹⁷ The senior brother, Mahmoud Moukarim¹⁸ first arrived in Douala in 1890 then moved to Libreville in 1906. By this time one of his brothers had also arrived in Cameroun (Merhy Hassan Moukarim¹⁹). He remained in Douala (and took the photos that became the *Frères Moukarim* postcards from Cameroon).

On 12 September 1914 the “*Moukarim Frères*” business was incorporated in Libreville, Gabon between Hassain, Mahmoud and Najib Moukarim (reported in the *Journal Officiel de l’Afrique Equatoriale Français* 1 Nov 1914 p. 438). It is not clear when the third brother, Najib, arrived in Gabon. It is highly likely that Hassan and Hassain are the same person given a slightly differing orthography.

It should also be pointed out that although the cards are marked *Moukarim Frères Duala and Libreville* I have not been able to trace any similar postcards based on photographs taken in Libreville or anywhere else in Gabon.

¹⁷ Labaki (1993) Métaxidès (2010: 29-32) and Haidar (2016: 126) give a general account of the Lebanese diaspora in Africa, predominantly of Lebanese people of Druze origins. See also Malki (2011) on their ambiguous status which in migration studies is sometimes characterized as being ‘sojourners’ (see Friedlander, 1988 for a Yemeni case study and Yang 2000 for discussion of the ‘sojourner hypothesis’). Monsour (2017) gives a parallel history of the Lebanese diaspora in Australia starting at a similar date.

¹⁸ I have been greatly helped by correspondence with various members of the wider Moukarim family who have alerted me to the potential confusions between different branches of family: they know of three different men called Mahmoud Moukarim who were all in Africa before the First World War! I am concerned with the branch who established themselves in Cameroon and Gabon.

¹⁹ I owe this identification to Chadi Moukarim, his grandson in Libreville in 2020. Note that Hassain is also used below.

It seems that although Lebanon was part of the Ottoman empire, Hassain Moukarim and his brothers were not regarded as enemy aliens and interned /expelled along with the German merchants after the fall of Douala. This may have been since they could quite legitimately claim to have left the jurisdiction of the Ottoman empire in search of a better life, even though Turkey joined the war on 24 October 1914 as a member of the Triple Alliance. By this time Douala had already been taken by the Allies.

In an Annual Report for 1918 we are told that the Moukarims had a local representative in Nkongsamba (Billot 1919: 54) but that ‘Le Syrien Moukarim a abandonné Fouban dans le courant de l’année’ (Billot 1919: 55). This documents their involvement in West Cameroun (around Nkongsamba see fn 20 below). A passing mention of the investigation of a burglary in 1919 confirms they had business premises near Kribi (*Journal Officiel du Cameroun* 1919 (32): 58). The first telephone directory published by the French Occupying forces in 1918 (JOC 1918 (19): 50) includes a number (#38) for Moukarim. By January 1919 the Moukarims are shown with two numbers in Douala: as well as the Marina Quay (#38) (visible in the image Marina 3 as noted above) and Akoua / Akwa (#54) most likely their private residence (JOC 1919 (29): 11).

Soon after the end of the war the Moukarims sold some businesses in Cameroon to the large French company (*Société Commerciale Industrielle et Agricole du Haut-Ogooué* often known as the *Société du Haut-Ogooué* hence SHO). Although SHO specialized in Gabon it operated throughout French West Africa (see Moutangou 2013: 217 and Coquery-Vidrovitch (1972)). The likelihood is that since the Moukarims were on hand in Douala during the war they were able to acquire some of the confiscated German plantations and other businesses, some of which they subsequently sold on in 1920.²⁰ This was not the end of their involvement in Cameroon however. According to the *Journal Officiel du Cameroun* two other members of the family visited round 1920²¹ and soon after WW2 a family member was involved with a court case which has

²⁰ Billot (1919: 56) of the 1918 Baré /Bana annual report has them renting empty land (“terrain nu”) formerly of the German company D.K.A.G (probably Deutsche Kautschuk-AG, the German Rubber Company). The Baré subdivision soon became the Nkongsamba subdivision see Zeitlyn 2018. My thanks to Tristan Oestermann for helping unpack the abbreviation.

²¹ JOC 1919 (30):32 On 28 Jan 1919 Faris Hassein Moukarim a Lebanese businessman arrived in Douala from Bordeaux; 1920 (41): 8 MM. Fouad Moukarim businessman arrived in Douala on *l’Europe* on 5 Dec 1919.

left a documentary legacy, so we know that Ali Moukarim, described as a sawyer, had to leave the building in rue du Roi-Albert, Douala, that he had rented from another sawyer, Mathias Minyangadou (from 1 Jan 1946 to 1 Jan 1948). He cited a decree of the French High Commissioner claiming this entitled him to stay. The point of law around which the court case hinged was the prerogative of the French High Commissioner in Cameroon and the status of his decrees. In discussing the legal implications of this case François Luchaire (1949-1950: 201) has left us a small legacy in the form of some further information about the Moukarims in Cameroun.

In the 1950s some directories give further information about Ali Moukarim and Mohamed Moukarim who I infer was his brother (although they could have been cousins). In 1951 both are described²² as being import/exporters. While the *Annuaire du Cameroun* (1952: 239) has

Douala

Moukarim (Ali), alimenataion générale, articles de voyage, bonneterie, confection, import-export, matériaux de construction, parfumerie, quincaillerie, tissus, vins et spiriteuc, run Joffre, (t) 1-60 BP 183

Moukarim (Mohamed) textiles, tissus, rue de 27-Aout-1940 BP 180

They are also recorded as owning land in Douala around this time. Eckert (1999: 429) records a land purchase in the Akwa quarter of Douala in which Ali Moukarim purchased a plot of land from Hector Ejenguélé Nkoulang in 1950.

A lens on internationalism

What these histories show is how complicated the fluxes of ethnicity and nationality were in the early twentieth century. We should note this continues to be the case: the Moukarims in Gabon stress that they have been there for more than a century and are full Gabonese citizens. The short duration of the German colony of Kamerun gave German merchants considerable advantages but merchants from Lebanon as well as British companies such as John Holt were able to operate successfully during this period. During WW1 the Moukarims benefited from the removal of German competition as did the others. However, it was not the case that French and British merchants simply replaced German ones.

²² *Annuaire Des Entreprises Coloniales*, 1951 Afrique Équatoriale, Gabon, Moyen-Congo, Oubangui-Chari-Tchad, Cameroun Mise en ligne: 19 janvier 2014. Dernière modification: 2 décembre 2014. <https://perma.cc/8LFP-BMEM> .

Turning to the postcards and the other photographs that the Moukarims took, they cannot be simply viewed as exemplifying the colonial gaze. The visual economy is more complicated than that (as Poole argues for the Andes 1997). What we have is a lens on internationalism and this gives us a perspective to start thinking about the complex set of actors who helped make history and its representations. This includes not only Lebanese merchants such as the Moukarims but Germans such as Moses Levi, the lawyer who acted for Mpundu Akwa in a successful court case in Germany in 1905.²³ In the field of photography I have already mentioned William Mudisa Bell who was taking photographs in Douala in 1890. Finally we should note that almost contemporary with the Moukarims was the efflorescence of photography in the court of King Njoya in Foumban, partly encouraged by missionaries and colonial officers. As Chris Geary has explored (2004, 2013), King Njoya's idiosyncratic response to the arrival of the Europeans was to have a court retainer, Nji Derema (Geary 2004: 151), trained as a photographer so that he could take control of the images being produced. We await further research in the hope that this can uncover more images taken by Njoya's photographer (an initial example from the Basel Mission archive is given in Geary (2004: 150 fig4)). For all that we know the sad ending of Njoya's personal history, dying in exile in Yaoundé in 1933 after falling out with the post First World War French administration, Njoya's photographs like those of the Moukarims show scenes of boots placed firmly on other (non-European) feet, conceptual boots shown in other representations. So my final image (although it was taken by a missionary) takes the metaphor literally and shows King Njoya wearing boots (but boots gifted by Germans).²⁴

²³ That is another story and one that has been ably explored in the collection edited by Elisa von Joeden-Forgey (2002).

²⁴ Geary 1996 discusses the politics of such uniforms, in Njoya's case contrasting Hausa-style costuming with the German inspired styling. On footwear she also notes 'German-made shoes were an indicator of status and wealth and a highly desirable commodity' (Geary 1996: 173.) Other Göhring images from same occasion survive: see <http://www.bmarchives.org/items/show/59731> and Geary (Fig. 8 1996:182).



Figure 38. Martin Göhring. *King Njoya in German uniform (including boots)*. Contemporary copy photo in collection of author. Taken c. 1907 by the missionary Martin Göhring. Original held in Basel Mission Archives ref E-30.29.043.

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Appendix 1 Online sources on the Moukarim family in Cameroun & Gabon

At <https://collectionmoukarim.wordpress.com/historique/> we find:

C'est à la fin du XIXe siècle, que Mahmoud Moukarim quitta la ville de Maten au Liban, pour prospecter l'Afrique Centrale en vue d'y installer un commerce. Un long voyage en bateau à vapeur l'enmena dans la zone portuaire de Douala en 1890.

<https://lespetitesmainsdelespoir.com/2015/12/15/clin-doeil-a-chadi-moukarim/> gives:

Il faut préciser que le grand-père de Chadi est d'origine libanaise et qu'il s'est installé au Gabon en 1906, que son père y est né avant les indépendances africaines, et que toute sa famille a reçu la nationalité gabonaise durant l'Indépendance du Gabon.

The website <http://moukarim.com/> makes no mention of Cameroon since according to Hasib Moukarim who established the site (p.c. email 21 April 2018), it concerns a different branch of the family in which *another* Mahmood Moukarim and his brother Kamel left Ras El Matn for Africa in 1906. Their businesses have been concentrated in Nigeria rather than Cameroon / Gabon.

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