

Article

Vulnerability and Dependence in Slavery and Post-Slavery Societies: A Historicisation of the Enslaved Children (*Pon Pekpen*) from the Bamum Kingdom (West Cameroon)

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Abstract: This article is a reflection on the history of enslaved children (*Pon pekpen*) in African slavery and post-slavery societies, such as the Bamum Kingdom. This traditional monarchy of the Grassfields of Cameroon, founded in 1394 by Nchare Yen, was one of the largest providers of captives transported to the Atlantic coast and used locally to meet the needs of traditional slavery. In this kingdom, slaves and their descendants, as well as enslaved peoples, represented nearly 80% of the total population. The trade of captives and servile practices left indelible traces, particularly where enslaved children were concerned. So, what did enslaved children represent in African slavery and post-slavery societies, such as the Bamum Kingdom? The aim of this study is to show that the enslaved children were the most vulnerable and dependent members of slavery and post-slavery systems. This study is based on oral, archival iconographic, written and electronic sources, using theories of social dominance and subaltern studies. It clearly shows that the vulnerability and dependence of enslaved children (*Pon pekpen*) made them special, weak and hopeful links in the slavery system and the persistence of slavery practices. They were mainly victims of traditional slavery and of the trans-Saharan and transatlantic slave trades. Despite the formal abolition of the slave trade and slavery between the 19th and 20th centuries, enslaved children and the descendants of enslaved people continue to be victims of a kind of subalternisation because they are usually considered second-class citizens.

Keywords: enslaved children; Bamum Kingdom; slave trade; slavery; subalternisation; dependence



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1. Introduction

The history of humanity has been marked by numerous socio-political, economic, cultural and religious phenomena, from the establishment of various political entities in the great centres of civilisation in Africa, Europe, Asia and the Americas. This is true with slavery and the slave trade (in Africa), which are generally presented as dark and painful pages in the history of human societies from the very beginning (Pétre-Grenouilleau 2004). For a long time, these two phenomena, which are highly charged with memory, still appeared to be taboo subjects in many Asian and African societies/countries. They were clearly surrounded by a kind of eloquent silence that was suspicious if not astonishing (Quenum 1993, p. 10). After the first research works dating from the 1930s and 1940s, there has been a revival of interest since the 1970s in light of numerous works devoted to these issues (Gaston-Martin 1933; Ducasse 1948; Curtin 1969; Meillassoux 1975; Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Lovejoy 1983; Lenguelle 1962; Renault and Daget 1985; Klein 1998; Pétre-Grenouilleau 2004). At the international level, the “Slave Route” project launched in Benin in 1994 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) aims to shed light on this part of human history by breaking the silence that has reigned until now (Araujo 2007, pp. 149–54). Rebaptised “Routes of Enslaved Peoples: Resistance, Liberty and Heritage”, this program has contributed to the production of innovative knowledge, the development of high-level scientific networks and the support

of memory initiatives on the theme of slavery, its abolition and the resistance it generated. In 2024, the Routes of Enslaved Peoples Programme will celebrate its 30th anniversary. While some people refuse to talk about it for fear of admitting their own weaknesses (Quenum 1993, p. 10) or responsibilities (M'Bokolo 1998, p. 8), others bring it up to controversies, particularly with regard to the responsibilities of the actors involved, accusing Africans of having sold their brothers (M'Bokolo 1998). In this respect, although Africa was an important peripheral link in the slave trade, Africans should nevertheless have the courage to look at themselves in the mirror. This accusation must be added the controversy over numerical evaluation, which pits the minimalist tendency against the maximalist tendency. (Inikori 1999, pp. 65–66). In fact, when it comes to stating the number of victims of the slave trade, minimalists tend to underestimate, while maximalists exaggerate a little. This once again highlights the need for objectivity in scientific research, especially on a subject as sensitive as the slave trade and colonial slavery. This controversial assessment has so far led to the racial and genocidal considerations that may or may not have underpinned the slave trade (Pétre-Grenouilleau 2004). Since the Congress of Vienna in 1815, slavery and the slave trade have been regarded as immoral practices and it should be noted that France has recognised these two phenomena as crimes against humanity according Taubira Law Lno. 2001-434 of 21 May 2001 (Loi Taubira n° 2001). Efforts are being made through commemoration days (Araujo 2007), research programmes and centres, with the corollary of significant scientific production on the issue and the development of cultural tourism. This last aspect is of particular interest to Afro-descendants. One of these groups has been involved in memorial tourism since 2003 as part of the 'Root Reconnection' programme run by Lisa Aubrey (Aubrey 2018).

These phenomena have had a considerable impact and continue to influence the lives of the countries and peoples that have experienced them. This is precisely the logic behind the statement: 'The destiny of the continent and its diaspora in the present does not stem from free and autonomous choices, but from the legacy of an imposed history marked by crime and all sorts of conditionalities' (Amougou 2018, p. 10). This is the case in the Bamum Kingdom (Njoya 1952; Tardits 1980). Founded in 1394 by Nchare Yen, a Tikar prince and his companions from Rifum, in present-day Bankim, the Bamum Kingdom was undoubtedly one of the main traditional slave monarchies in the Grassfields of Cameroon (Bah 1985, p. 673). Here, systematic studies on slavery and the slave trade are few and far between. Through his Diplôme d'Etudes Approfondies (DEA) dissertation entitled 'L'esclavage dans l'Afrique Précoloniale, l'Exemple du Royaume Abron de Gyaman et du Royaume Bamoun', Aboubakar Njiassé-Njoya can validly be considered as the pioneer of the slavery studies in the Bamum Kingdom (Njiassé-Njoya 1978). More than a decade later, he published a very interesting article entitled "La captivité dans le Royaume Bamum du XIX^e au XX^e siècles" (Njiassé-Njoya 1991). A few years later, he was followed in this field by Thomas Roger Mapoure (1994). After a long period in the wilderness, Sylvain Mbohou, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, turned his attention to the subject, firstly as part of his Master's dissertation, defended in 2013, and then by devoting his Doctoral dissertation, defended in 2021, (Mbohou 2013, 2021) to a similar study.

These various works focus globally on the phenomena of the slave trade and slavery in the Bamum Kingdom. None of these works deals specifically with enslaved children in Bamum country. This modest study, therefore, provides an opportunity to reflect on the subject. First of all, however, it is important to clarify the meaning of the concept of enslaved children. According to the Universal Dictionary, when we speak of a child, we are referring to "a human being from birth to the age of puberty" (Cerquiglini and Ollé 2013). According to the International Convention on the Rights of the Child, "A child is defined as every human being below the age of 18 years unless under national law, majority is attained earlier" (UNICEF France/September 2003). However, the meaning of the concept of the child can also be understood in relation to parentage. In other words, the notion of a child is not just at all a matter of age. It refers broadly to "the son or daughter, whatever his or her age, person in relation to his or her parents". In the Bamum post-slavery society,

the expression *Pon Pekpen* (See to Figure 1 below) is used to refer to enslaved children and descendants of enslaved people, regardless of age. The fate of this category of people has changed somewhat since the formal abolition of the slave trade and slavery in the 19th and 20th centuries. This has been especially true since Cameroon gained independence in 1960–1961, as all members of society now enjoy the status of citizens with rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 10 May 1948 and included in the preamble to the Cameroon Constitution of 3 March 1960. It should also be pointed out that with the formal abolition of slavery, these phenomena did not disappear overnight. Socio-cultural constraints contribute in some way to their persistence. In other words, post-slavery societies do not simply mean societies without slaves or societies after the abolition of slavery. It is more a question of all the structural and functional characteristics of the former slavery societies. So, what did enslaved children and their descendants represent in African slavery and post-slavery societies, such as the Bamum Kingdom?



Figure 1. Location of the Bamum Kingdom in West Cameroon. Source: KAMDEM Pierre, “Le Programme de la Route Des Chefferies à Dschang: patrimonialisation, migrations et développement local dans les hautes terres de l’Ouest-Cameroun”, Espace populations sociétés [En ligne], 2017/3 | 2017, mis en ligne le 25 janvier 2018, in <http://journals.openedition.org/eps/7289>; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/eps.7289>, consulted on 24 May 2021.

The aim of this article is to show that, in the Bamum Kingdom, enslaved children (*Pon pekpen*) were the group most exposed to vulnerability and dependence in a slavery and post-slavery context. This study is based on oral, archival, iconographic, written and electronic sources. The data were collected and analysed from the perspective of social dominance theory (Sidanius and Pratto 1999; Duarte et al. 2004, pp. 97–126; Guimond et al. 2008, pp. 15–42) and subaltern studies theory (Pouchepadass 2020). In this case, we are talking about enslaved children who are part of the servile group. Because of the social structure in place and the formal abolition of slavery practices, it is tempting to think that these masses have experienced a degree of social mobility in the meantime, i.e., changes in the social status of individuals or social groups over time. If there was a change, it would imply a difference between the social status of the parents and that of their children (Bertaux 1974, pp. 329–62; Duarte et al. 2004, pp. 97–126). In sociology, social mobility is often understood as the possibility of upward social mobility, as opposed to social reproduction, and as a response to issues of inequality and the redistribution of income and wealth. However, it also includes downgrading, which is strictly speaking the opposite of upward social mobility (Goldthorpe 1987; Pratto et al. 2006, pp. 271–320). In a post-slavery context,

this mobility refers to the passage of people from slave or enslaved status to freed or, better still, free status. With Cameroon's accession to independence, this freedom or emancipation had the induced effect of former enslaved peoples and their descendants acquiring citizen status within the republican framework (Viguerie 2014). To gain a better understanding of the theme addressed in this study, we should first look at the context of the founding of the Bamum Kingdom in order to highlight the introduction of slavery. Next, we can show the place of enslaved children through the categories of slaves and finally analyse the fate of enslaved children following the abolition of slavery.

2. The Founding of the Kingdom and the Introduction of Slavery

The time and place in which the Bamum Kingdom was founded was marked by violence. The result was the establishment of a warrior monarchy. The expansionist wars waged by the Bamum kings not only increased the size of the kingdom but also multiplied the population. The social organisation put in place and the internal and external need for labour (captives) resulted in the establishment of a slavery society.

2.1. The Foundation of the Bamum Kingdom

The Bamum Kingdom was the largest and most extensive Grassfield Tikar kingdom (Saha and Kouesso 2017) founded in 1394 by Nchare Yen and his companions from Rifum (Njoya 1952; Njiassé-Njoya 1978, 1980). The Grassfields of Cameroon also correspond to what is known as the Western Highlands, called "Grassfields" by the Germans and "Grassland" by the British. Also called the western region of Cameroon, most of the kingdoms here were founded by people of Tikar origin. It is important to note that not all the kingdoms in the region are Tikar. Geographically, we distinguish between the "Western Grassfields", which cover the current administrative region of the North-West to which must be added Lebialem in the South-West region and the Eastern Grassfields, which cover the current West region, including the Kingdom of Bamum. In a presentation of this kingdom, Aboubakar Njiassé-Njoya states: "The Bamum Kingdom is located in the extension of the mountains of West Cameroon, between the rivers Noun and Mbam, tributaries of the Sanaga. Situated at an altitude of between 900 and 1200 m, this territory receives more than 1500 mm/year of rainfall and its volcanic soils are covered with dense vegetation, reflecting its position as a contact zone between savannah and forest" (Njiassé-Njoya 1978, p. 3). This kingdom was located precisely on the 11th degree of East longitude and between the 5th and 6th degree of North latitude. It is 140 km long and 80 km wide. It is separated to the north-west by the present-day West (to which it belongs) and North-West regions, and to the south-west by a conventional line. Apart from the northern boundary, which links the two tributaries of the Mbam-Noun and the *Mappé*, which is man-made, the others are natural. The Mbam (*Ripa*), which flows eastwards in a north-south direction, forms the eastern boundary (Njiassé-Njoya 1980, p. 83). There is no doubt about the existence of the Kingdom's natural boundaries. This is borne out by this extract from documents in the Archives Nationales de Yaoundé (ANY) dating from the French colonial era, "The Bamoun region (...) has natural boundaries, the River Noun (tributary of the Mbam to the West, the River Mbam to the East, the River Mapé (tributary of the Mbam to the North)" (ANY, 2AC, 8402, Rapport annuel, Région Bamoun, 1953, p. 18). The River Noun separates the Bamum Kingdom (now the Department of Noun) from the Mifi, Ndé and bamboutos Divisions (on the Bamiléké plateau). Here, "the Noun plain opens up a restricted area 10 to 15 km wide between the Kougham and Mbam massifs and the River Noun, which forms a border with the ex-British Cameroon" (ANY, 2AC, 8402, Rapport annuel, Région Bamoun, 1953, p. 18). The area of Ex-British Cameroon corresponds here to the current North-West region. This can be seen on this location map.

The above map shows the localisation of the Bamum Kingdom and gives some information about the large territory where the enslaved people were installed by the nobles for agricultural activities. It also provides the overview of the extent of the Bamum Kingdom (Ngouh Pamum, "Pays Bamum"; "Bamumland" or "Bamum country") since the pre-colonial

period. However, it is clear that these boundaries have evolved over time. Today, the boundaries of this kingdom merge with those of the Noun Division (Matateyou 1988).

Moreover, the socio-genesis of this kingdom has often been the subject of controversy, with several versions circulating about the distant origins of the founders and the reasons why they left their original homeland (Tardits 1991, pp. 22–25). However, a comparison of the various sources available shows that the founding of this political entity is intrinsically linked to migration and territorial conquest. In one version, the founding ancestors of the Bamum Kingdom came from Syria, from where they had been driven by famine (Tardits 1980, p. 856). For Cheickh Anta Diop, the Egyptian origin of the Bamum is not in doubt (Diop 1976, p. 392). In any case, it is now established that they left the Nile valley following the historical migration routes, passing through Bornou before staying on the Adamaoua plateau, in the mother group of the Tikars or ‘wanderers’. From there, they progressed and settled further south. In this respect, the work of Eldridge Mohammadou shows that the Bamum are descended from the Mboum tribe. According to this author, the Bamum were first established on the Adamaoua Plateau before breaking away from the Mboum to settle at Rifum in the Tikar Plain, from where they would go on to found the present-day Bamum Kingdom (Mohammadou 1971, p. 55). This is also emphasised by Victor Julius Ngoh when he states that “the Bamoun country is the largest of the Tikar kingdoms in the Grassfields” (Ngoh 1990, pp. 5–6). Its founder, Nchare Yen, set off from Rifum in present-day Bakim with his brothers and companions in search of new lands. But the brotherhood of Nchare Yen, Ngouoso and Fombam broke up on the banks of the Mbam. Following this break-up, Nchare and his family set out to conquer new lands after crossing the Mappé. It is thought that between 200 and 300 people, including women and children, crossed the river in the wake of Prince Nchare. He subdued some seven principalities before initially settling in Njimom. The Bamum state was proclaimed there and Njimom thus became the first capital of the kingdom. The fundamental pact sealed under the *Sép* tree at a place called *Sâmba Ngùo* stipulates that “The Bamoun State is born and Nchare is its king. He will freely choose his heir from among his sons. The seven *Kom* companions (*Nkom* in the singular), co-signatories, are the King’s enthroning advisors, responsible for keeping the fundamental law of the kingdom and ensuring that it is applied (Njoya 1952; Njiassé-Njoya 1978; Tardits 1980).

The co-founders then have functions. However, they were also called upon to kill themselves if they were sentenced to death by the courts for high treason. From Njimom, Nchare conquered a dozen other ethnic groups and established his new capital at Fouban after defeating the *Pa Mben*. According to the oral tradition collected by Njiassé-Njoya, “Nchare conquered the indigenous peasant principalities and set up the kingdom’s definitive capital on the ruins of the *Mben*, ‘*Fom Pa Mben*’, which later became Fouban” (Njiassé-Njoya 1978, p. 3). After the Bamum victory, Nchare resettled the *Mben* in a district of the town. Since then, the kingdom founded by Nchare Yen has been ruled by his lineage, with the exception of King Ngouhouo, successor to Mbuembue. This is shown in the following Figure 2 of the bamum dynaty from Nchare Yen to Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya:



Figure 2. The Bamum dynasty from Nchare Yen to Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya. Source: Mbohoul, 26 March 2012).

Given this picture, we agree with Aboubakar Njiassé-Njoya, who points out that “According to Bamum chronology, this kingdom was founded around the 14th century by Nchare, a Tikar prince from Rifum in the north. But the current trend among researchers places the origin of this kingdom around the 14th century or the beginning of the 17th century” (Njiassé-Njoya 1978, p. 3). The kingdom thus created was marked by war.

2.2. *A Warrior and Slavery Kingdom Connected to the Trans-Saharan and Transatlantic Trade Networks*

The political entity founded by Nchare had all the characteristics of a warrior and slave-owning kingdom. It was destined to be evolved in a turbulent geopolitical environment. This turmoil was fuelled by both centrifugal and centripetal forces. These included inter-chieftdom conflicts (Saha 2005, p. 91). These wars were part of the logic of the hierarchy of regional forces, all engaged in territorial conquests. Each person used means at his disposal to try as far as possible to impose his hegemony at various levels.

While it is true that Nchare was the founding ruler, it is also true that not all his successors were warriors. For almost three hundred years, notably from the reign of Ngouopou to that of Kouotou (1418 and 1757), the surface area of the Kingdom remained unchanged (Sindayihebura 2002–2003, p. 18). However, history was to accelerate from 1757 onwards when the Kingdom resumed its warlike activities with greater urgency and with repercussions throughout the region. The wars waged by the Bamum rulers reached a climax during the 11th dynasty with the reign of Mbuembue, the conqueror (1757–1814). This king is known throughout history for his bravery, his fighting spirit, his robustness and his determination, all of which contributed to the creation of a symbolic capital of deterrence and a climate of terror in the kingdom and the region. His conquests had multiplied the size of the kingdom. The basis of his war strategy led him to say that “when you set the limits of your mouth, they always end up disappearing” (Njoya 1952, p. 26). In his almost unbridled desire to expand and ensure the security and independence of his territory, he declared “My name is war, my food is war and my bed is war. I will draw the boundaries of my kingdom with blood and black iron, for the borders drawn by the mouth always fade away” (Njoya 1952, p. 26). With Mbuembue, great conquests were organised on the natural borders of the Mbam, Mapè and Noun. In the collective memory, Mbuembue is known as an enormous man, a great warrior who imposed Bamum military supremacy in the region. In this regard, Thierno Mouctar Bah states “Thus, through armed violence, the Bamoun secured control of a vast geographical area bounded by the rivers Noun, Mbam and Mappé” (Bah 1985, p. 673). The conquest of the Kingdom’s territory was therefore the work of three monarchs. While Nchare Yen conquered the northern part of the kingdom, the southern part was conquered by Nsangou and Mbuembue. (Sindayihebura 2002–2003, p. 80). The territory was thus multiplied by four and the population more than doubled. The Bamum population was estimated at 60,000 at the beginning of the XXth century and living in an area of 7700 km² (ANY, 2AC, 8402, Rapport annuel, Région Bamoun, 1953, p. 17).

This territorial expansion was of undeniable economic importance, as the prisoners of war (captives) were used to exploit the vast areas acquired through the war, making the landowners and the majority of the Bamum as rich as possible (Njiassé-Njoya 1980, p. 160). In this vast kingdom, life was based on the principles of royalty and respect for customs (Tardits 1979, pp. 671–96). The new Bamum customary code, favoured the creation of a slavery society in which the nobles dominated and exploited the enslaved people. In any case, the hierarchical nature of Bamum society was an established fact. It was the fruit of a multi-faceted historical process. The building efforts of the various Bamum monarchs, committed to a logic of appeasement and fusion, had made it possible to arrive at this organisation. To better understand the organisation of Bamum society, it is useful to look at the table or the organisation chart below.

This seven-tier social structure also reflects the socio-economic status of the members of the various social groups that make it up as it is presented through the Figure 3 which

shows the Bamum social structure organigram. Here, from top to bottom, we can clearly distinguish the following: the King, the dignitaries (notabilities), the people (free men) and the captives/enslaved peoples. These servile groups were made up of enslaved or subjugated people. Most of the slaves came from predatory wars or captive violence, and to a certain extent, another group was made up of individuals who could be described as “asocial”. At the end of the predatory campaigns, the captives were taken to the royal palace (Mbohou 2017, pp. 99–110). The king, after taking a portion for his own account, distributed the rest of the spoils of war to the chiefs of the lineages for the exploitation of the vast royal domains. Warriors who had distinguished themselves by their bravery on the battlefield were also rewarded by the king (Tardits 1980, p. 157). Brave warriors of servile origin could be ennobled. This meant that social ascension was possible and real. This effectively ruled out any idea of caste in this pyramidal, patrilineal society (Njiassé-Njoya 1978). There were therefore bridges between the different social groups, for example, enabling Ngbetkom Ndouombouo, a former slave, to become *Tupanka* (Chief of Staff of the Royal Army). It was in this capacity that, in 1895, he attempted to usurp King Njoya’s throne while the latter was still young. This led to civil war (Mbohou 2013). This war ended in 1896, thanks to the victorious intervention of the Fulani cavalry of Lamido Oumarou of Banyo (Mbohou 2022).

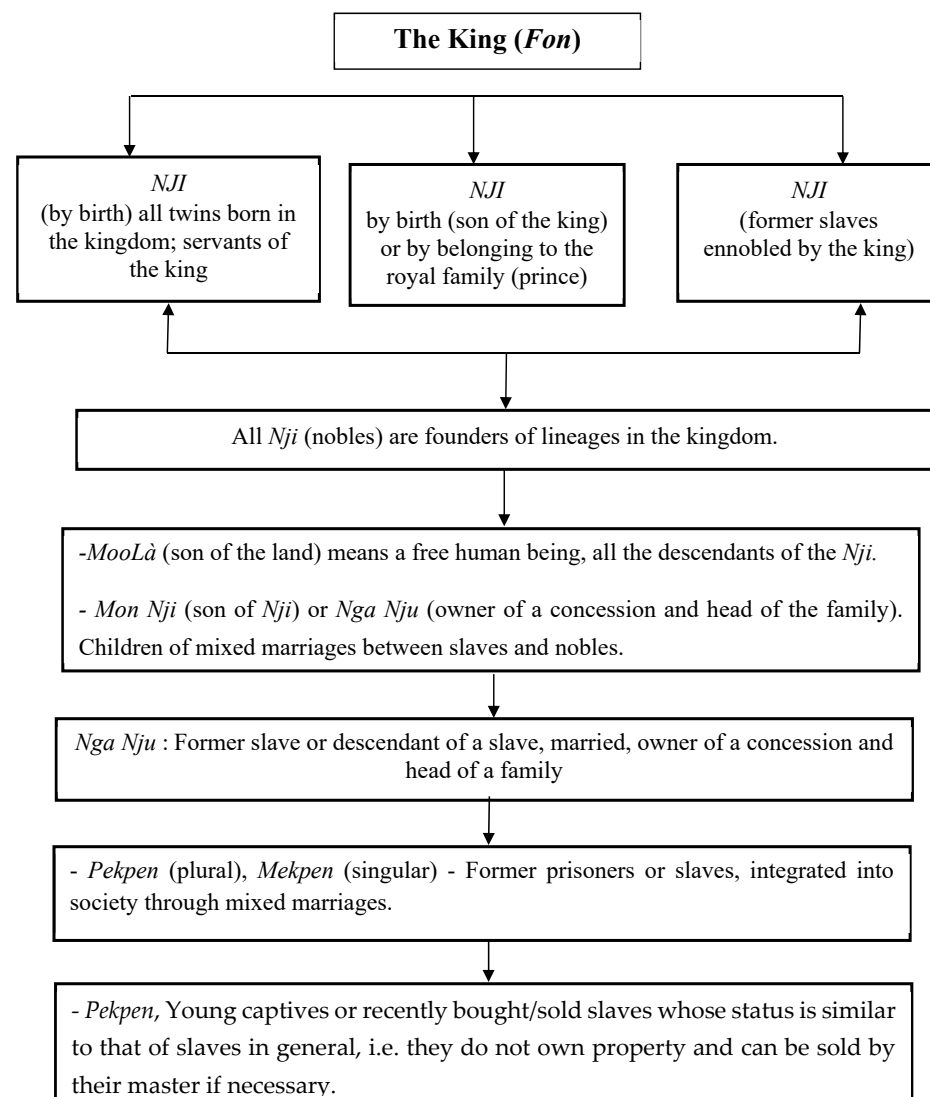


Figure 3. Bamum social structure organigram. Source: (Njiassé-Njoya 1978). “L’esclavage en Afrique précoloniale: l’exemple du Royaume Bamoun et du Royaume Abron de Gyaman”, DEA History thesis, University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne, p. 4.

Once the captives had been obtained, the owners would enslave them in different parts of the kingdom, as required. The Figure 4 below presented the major trading houses in Fouban in the XIXth century. This means that the captives could be obtained from the people in charge of the trading houses, the biggest of which have been identified in the heart of the Bamum kingdom at Fouban. This is shown by the following table.

Designation	Responsable	Localisation
Chikoue	<i>Nâh Chikoue</i>	Mambain Panju
Mondare	<i>Nji Mondare et Nji Nkemme</i>	Njidare
Luh	<i>Nji Luh</i>	Fountain
Rounouo	Rounouo	Njitout

Figure 4. The major trading houses in Fouban in the XIXth century. Source: (Mbohou 2021). Le Royaume Bamum (Ouest) et le Lamidat de Banyo (Adamaoua) dans les traites négrières arabo-musulmane et transatlantique (1823 à 1923), PhD Thesis in History, University of Dschang-Cameroon, p. 208.

This table shows that most of the kingdom's trading houses were based in Fouban. Chikoue was the most famous. They were also found throughout the kingdom. However, in addition to internal slavery, the Bamum Kingdom was also involved in export trade. Its geopolitical position in relation to the Sahara and the Atlantic enabled it to play the interfacing role between the forest and savannah zones. All this was facilitated by the trade networks that ran right through it, as can be seen on this following map presenting of the main trade routes in the Bamum Kingdom under the reign of Njoya (1889–1933).

Figure 5 shows that the Bamum Kingdom was a centre and a major commercial crossroads because of its pivotal geographical position between the Grassfields and the Northern Cameroon or Sudanese zone because Adamaoua was a main part of the old Adamawa, and part of the Caliphate of Sokoto located in the Sudanese region of Africa and linked to the trans-Saharan network. It is now in the northern part of the actual Cameroon and Nigerian. So, the Bamum Kingdom was therefore geographically predisposed to play the role of interface between the forest zone and the Sudan. In the trafficking networks identified in the Bamum Kingdom, human goods fell into several categories.

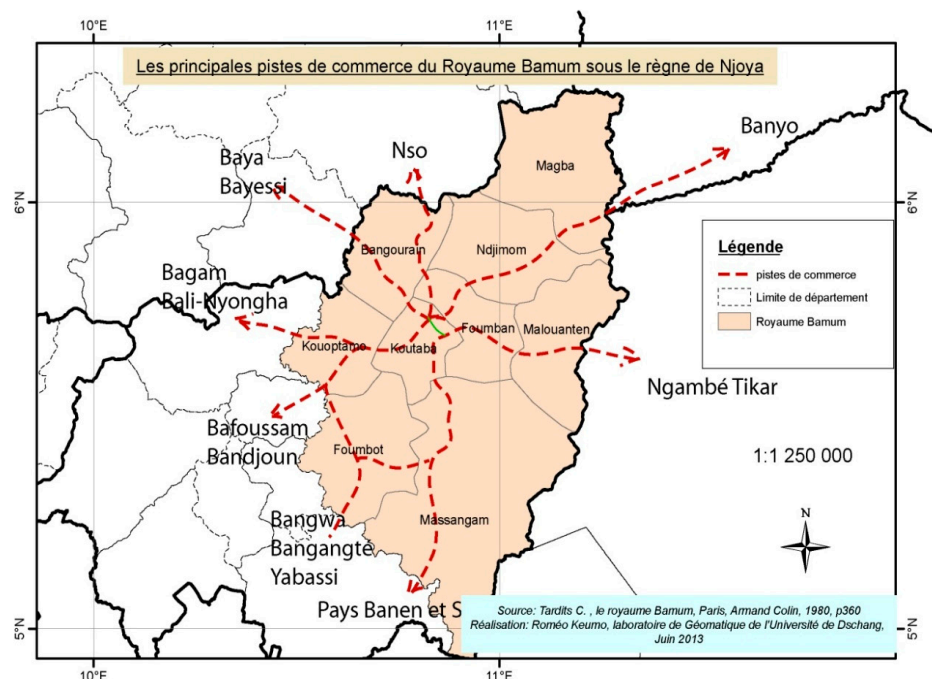


Figure 5. The main trade routes in the Bamum Kingdom under the reign of Njoya. Source: Map realised by Romeo Keumo Songong Roméo based on Tardits Claude (1980), *Le Royaume Bamoun*, Paris, Armand Colin, p. 360.

3. The Origins and Fate of the Different Slaves Categories: The Place of Enslaved Children

In this section, after discussing the origins of captives/slaves, we will present the categories of slaves in relation to the local slavery system and with reference to the export trades, in which the Bamum Kingdom was also involved.

3.1. The Origins of Slaves in the Bamum Kingdom

Adult slaves, both men and women, had several origins. In addition to captives from wars and raids, there were also victims of penal slavery, who were then referred to as outlaws. As a warrior kingdom, its soldiers took captives from their enemies on the Battlefield (Mbohou 2017). This was the case with the Bamum's organised expeditions to the Fang in the east and south of the kingdom:

The Kingdom's militias remained unchanged and the objectives of military policy seemed constant to take prisoners in order to exploit the Kingdom's lands. The campaign against the Fang is said to have yielded eight hundred captives; the expeditions to the east and south were the most profitable. (Tardits 1980, p. 192).

War was therefore one of the main means of supplying captives. These were intended for local exploitation or for sale outside the kingdom. However, war was not the only source of slaves. There were also victims of raiding campaigns.

Apart from the wars that provided captives, history tells us that the Bamum also organised raids. In reality, even if the exploitation of the land acquired, thanks to the conquests of King Mbuembue, was at the centre of preoccupations, large-scale human trafficking had become a vicious circle where one had to choose between predator and prey. With this in mind, it should be noted that, at the same time as the Bamum were organising wars and raids beyond their borders, some of their neighbours were also taking captives. This was the case with Bali-Tchamba, certain Bamiléké chiefdoms and the Peul from the north. Claude Tardits refers, in particular, to the two invasions of the Bamum Kingdom by mounted fighters. Although these invasions took place before 1895, they are said to have resulted in the abduction of captives as follows: "History records that the Peul invaded the country for the first time, took the capital from which the King had to flee and took many captives (...)" (Tardits 1980, p. 131).

These invasions by the Fulani from the north should be distinguished from the Bali-Tchamba attacks. Aboubakar Njiassé-Njoya removes this ambiguity when he refers to the Bali-Tchamba as *Pare Nkoutou* and to the Foulbé or Peul as *Pare Magnit*. In the case in point, these are indeed those of the Lamidat of Banyo. The latter, like other lamidats in Fombina, and thanks to their open borders, organised numerous raiding campaigns and other military operations in other regions in order to obtain supplies of captives (Bah 1993, p. 74).

In Bamum society, slavery was part of the penal system. Some acts such as murder, vampirism, witchcraft, adultery, treason, theft and poisoning were considered offences. Accordingly, the perpetrators, who were then considered outlaws, were liable to various forms of punishment depending on the nature of the offence committed (APF 61, Livre du jugement du palais, minutes du tribunal, 1919; APF 75, Acte de jugement de serviteurs du sultan, négrier, Foumban, 1912–1919). Initially, the punishment was caning, mutilation, exclusion or capital punishment. These penalties were applied mainly in the context of customary slavery. In the second stage, the penalty was essentially sale, especially when the demand for labour had become very high. Offenders and their families (wives and children) sometimes suffered the same penalties. Some offenders were even sold. We can therefore understand that the establishment of a social order within a territorial framework was achieved by a coercive authority, with adequate means of persuasion and dissuasion. More fundamentally, at the judicial level, the sale of people was one of the sanctions imposed on the perpetrators of trouble, as was the case in Bamum country with the Gbetkom Ndoubouot rebellion in 1895–1896 (Mbohou 2013, 2017, 2021, 2022).

This system of slavery, therefore, had certain characteristics, particularly in terms of the categorisation of enslaved people.

3.2. *The Different Slave Categories: The Place of Enslaved Children*

In the slavery system, the fate of all victims was virtually the same. Thus, the fate of enslaved children was linked to that of their parents. The entire human herd was, in fact, the property of the owners who exploited them at will (Lenguelle 1962, pp. 18–19). Captives were enslaved in various parts of the kingdom. Rural slaves were in the majority engaged in agricultural work, hunting and the rearing of small livestock and poultry. This category could well be considered as harem slaves (Lenguelle 1962, pp. 27–28). On the other hand, urban slaves, who could be equated with public slaves, were made up of royal slaves. Some of them were also integrated into the royal army because they were considered formidable warriors.

Captive women were essentially seen as manna from heaven. Women generally played the role of concubines because they were reputed to be very kind and capable of taking good care of children. They mainly performed in domestic tasks as servants, particularly for queens, princesses and the wives of dignitaries and other free men. In this case, we are dealing with house slaves who maintained a reciprocal relationship with their slave-owners. This is the symbiotic slavery theorised by Maurice Lenguelle in the first part of his work devoted to the analysis of the institution of slavery (Lenguelle 1962, p. 11). In all cases, these slaves were exposed to all kinds of trafficking. It is therefore clear that after their enslavement, slaves performed a variety of jobs depending on where they were. The will of the masters and external demand also gave rise to export trades, notably through the trans-Saharan and transatlantic networks. Enslaved children were not spared in this trade.

Because of their parentage, the enslaved children and the descendants of enslaved people (*Pom Pekpen*) were also slaves. The slave owners saw to it that their parents brought them up well, as they were the next generation in terms of labour and the symbol of their prestige. The care provided to slaves, in general, and enslaved children, in particular, was therefore justified by their purchase value and, above all, by their contribution to satisfying the various needs of the masters (Lenguelle 1962, p. 23). In this sense, it was a kind of human breeding (Lenguelle 1962, p. 24). The aim was to create the conditions needed to exploit the vast royal estates over the long term. This analysis shows that captives were treated differently, depending on their sex, age or place of enslavement. This made it possible to distinguish several categories of slaves and, therefore, types of slavery. In any case, it is clear that capture played a part in social stratification. It was not simply an act of moving men from one place to another; but also an act of great violence and detribalisation. It was also a kind of undifferentiated instrument for the unhuman treatment of captives. The abolition of slavery in the 19th century marked a decisive turning point for slaves in general and child slaves in particular.

4. The Abolition of Slavery and the Fate of enslaved Children (*Pon pekpen*) in the Bamum Kingdom

The abolition of slavery in the Bamum Kingdom was an extension of the vast abolition movement that had been underway in the Western world during the 1800s (Schmidt 2007, pp. 41–52). It should be seen in the context of the abolition process initiated by English abolitionists in Cameroon from 1840 onwards, without forgetting local abolitionist initiatives.

4.1. *The Abolition of Slavery in the Bamum Kingdom*

The formal abolition of the slave trade at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 and reiterated at the Second Congress of Berlin (1884–1885) was not enough to put a definitive end to the trade. Great Britain had to lead a campaign to crack down on the illegal trade, particularly in the Atlantic Ocean. In the Gulf of Guinea, the Royal Navy set up its base on the island of Fernando Pô.

So, from Fernando Pô, the anti-slavery campaign led by the Royal Navy reached the coast of Cameroon. As a result, several abolition treaties were signed with the coastal chiefs, notably those of the Duala and Bakweri. The very first was signed on 10 June 1840 between King Akwa and King Bell on the one hand and Reginad J. S. Levinje, Walter J. Pollar and John Lilley (the first European resident in Douala) on the other (Mveng 1984, p. 148). This treaty enjoined the Duala chiefs to report to His Majesty's cruisers the presence of any slave ship in the Wouri. On the assumption that the trade was a source of income for these chiefs, the English reserved compensation for them in return (Ngongo 1987, p. 20). A second treaty was signed a year later, on 7 May 1841, between the same Duala chiefs and the Englishman William Simpson Blount. In this treaty, which reiterated and supplemented that of 1840, King Bell undertook to prohibit his subjects or dependants from selling slaves, transporting slaves out of the territory or aiding, abetting or assisting in any such enterprise, on pain of punishment (Mveng 1984, p. 149). A third treaty was signed on 29 April 1852 between the English representatives and the Duala chiefs (Mveng 1984, p. 148). This other treaty (also signed separately with King Bell on 1 May 1852) covered, among other things, the abolition of the slave trade, the prohibition of human sacrifice, religious freedom, the protection of missionaries (Alfred Saker was one of the signatories) and the creation of a Christian cemetery. In essence, it was a proclamation of the abolition of an indemnity for the chiefs (Ngongo 1987, p. 20). Despite the promises or commitments made by the coastal chiefs, the English were well aware that these were not sufficient and effective guarantees. This is why threats (severe punishments) were included in Article 1 of the 1841 treaty. To toughen the tone, the English declaration of 25 April 1842 stated that in the event of non-satisfaction, the indemnity provided for would be abolished altogether (Mveng 1984, p. 149). The various treaties signed with the coastal chiefs were of undeniable importance. They gradually undermined the slave trade networks that linked the hinterland to the coast. The English believed that the treaties they signed with the coastal chiefs would put an end to the slave trade. In the Grassfields, the slave trade, now illegal, continued against a backdrop of customary slavery and raiding parties.

Despite the abolitionist actions led by the English in the context of colonial rivalries on the Cameroonian coast, the continuation of the struggle fell instead to Germany, which, through the protectorate treaty of 12 July 1884, took possession of Kamerun. In the early days of their presence in Cameroon, the Germans found the English consuls negotiating with the coastal chiefs to abolish the slave trade. They believed that slavery was defined by the slave trade. It was not long before they realised the existence of the slave trade until the conquest of the hinterland (Mveng 1984, p. 156). Following in the footsteps of the British, the slave trade was banned throughout Kamerun by imperial decree on 28 June 1895 (Mveng 1984, pp. 150, 156). Traditional servitude was also abolished by Chancellor Von Bulow's decree of 21st February 1902 (Mveng 1984, p. 156). These measures did not have the expected results, as it is one thing to issue an administrative or regulatory note but quite another to enforce it.

Following the departure of the Germans from Cameroon in 1916, the French deployed energetic means to eradicate the slave trade. The French administration issued decrees and orders to put an end to resistance. Thus, the first French text dating back to 18th August 1917 was an order prohibiting the pawning of women (Mveng 1984, p. 156), even though men were not spared from the slave trade. After the First World war, Cameroon became a sub-mandate territory (1919–1945) of the League of Nations. On 26 April 1923, France, in its capacity as mandatary power, took a second step (A.N.Y., 3AC, 302; Mveng 1984, p. 157). This was the decree on the suppression of the slave trade and anthropophagi, published in the Journal Officiel du Cameroun (A.N.Y., JOC, 26 April 1923, p. 17). More specifically, in the Bamum Kingdom, slavery was officially abolished by the French administrator Prestat in 1919 (Njiassé-Njoya 1991, pp. 93–94). The modalities of this long and bitter anti-slavery struggle, therefore, varied according to the actors and the realities on the ground. This was especially true with regard to enslaved children and the descendants of enslaved people.

4.2. The Fate of Enslaved Children and Descendants of Enslaved People in the Bamum Kingdom Post-Slavery Society

In the Bamum Kingdom, the slave trade was banned by King Njoya (1889–1933). Breaking with the practices of a traditional slave state, this king took this decision in the international context of the time, marked by the abolitionist movement. As such, he was a figurehead for respect for human rights. When we consider that when he came to power, enslaved persons represented 2/3 of the total population of his kingdom, it is easy to understand that the decision to ban human trafficking represented a complete break with the habits and customs in force up until then. He amended the Bamum penal code. One of the most remarkable aspects of the amendments concerned the ban on human trafficking. Joseph Owona recounts King Njoya's writings as follows: "(...) if someone becomes one of the chiefs of the house of *Mutngu*, he must not arrest little children to sell them and eat the money". In addition to banning human trafficking, and with particular reference to children, King Njoya also abolished the death penalty. This revolutionary and reformist act was justified by King Njoya himself in these terms: "I, Njoya, King of the Pamom, have changed these things in the land of the Pamom to remove the fear of the people" (Njoya 1952). Recalling the characteristics of the status of slaves in the Bamum Kingdom, the eminent French anthropologist Claude Tardits points out that until then, they were nothing more than an instrument of labour at the slave owner's disposal. If, for example, a slave died without paying tax to his owner, his corpse was burnt. Under Njoya, on the other hand, "the heir to the *Nkom Nda* could bury the deceased and pay the tribute required after burial" (Tardits 1980). In this respect, King Njoya appears to have been a true champion of human rights. He went even further in other royal edicts. Socio-economic measures included opening up the right to land ownership to people of servile origin. The aim of this reform was to stimulate the development of vast estates, particularly in rural areas. From then on, access to land ownership depended on the length of occupation. As Claude Tardits suggests "No land can be taken away from a farmer who has planted for ten years" (Tardits 1980). This new agrarian legislation encouraged the emergence of numerous plantations in the kingdom.

It is understandable that King Njoya is rightly presented as an architect of human rights (Koufan et al. 2014, pp. 113–24). However, the various changes he made did not totally undermine the foundations of the kingdom because even if people of servile origin had, for example, become landowners by force of circumstance, the chiefs of lineages and members of the royal family, as well as notables, remained the largest owners of land, even though it was occupied and cultivated by the descendants of enslaved people. At the same time, it should be remembered that on a purely symbolic level, all the land in the kingdom still belonged to the King. It was therefore a break in continuity, because while he was modernising his kingdom, he was still retaining its essence. He was thus adapting the organisation and governance of the Bamum Kingdom to the changing times (Koufan et al. 2014, pp. 113–24). The reforms undertaken had therefore not led to the establishment of a truly egalitarian society. It was not until the arrival of colonial administrators at the beginning of the 20th century, Cameroon's independence in 1960 and, above all, the return to a multi-party system in the 1990s, that enslaved people and their descendants were gradually freed. However, socio-cultural constraints continue to mark a dividing line between the nobles, the former masters and the descendants of enslaved persons. On certain occasions in socio-cultural and political life, people do not hesitate to remind them of their servile origins. This causes serious frustration, one of the manifestations of which is the massive support provided to the Cameroon Democratic Union (CDU) since the return of a multi-party system in Cameroon in the 1990s (Mbohhou 2023).

5. Conclusions

At the end of this investigation, which was focused on the place of the enslaved children in African slavery and post-slavery societies, it is clear that enslaved children and the descendants of enslaved persons (*Pom Pekpen*) were the most vulnerable and

dependent social group of the Kingdom. As a warrior and slavery monarchy, the violence was therefore at the heart of the Bamum Kingdom slavery system life. It is therefore understandable that the enslaved peoples were essentially the fruit of wars and raiding campaigns. Capture, as the preferred method of supplying labour, played a part in social stratification. It was not a simple act of moving men from one place to another, but also an act of great violence and, above all, of detribalisation of enslaved children in particular and captives in general. It was also a kind of undifferentiated instrument of the coercion against captives. The various forms of enslavement to which captives were subjected in the Bamum Kingdom clearly showed that the enslaved persons were nothing more than an instrument of labour at the slave owners' disposal. We are referring here to the right of life and death or the possibility of selling it. The human livestock available was therefore both a source of incomes and a symbol of prestige for the slave owners. In the logic of human breeding, it was in the slave owners' interest to take good care of their herds of the enslaved persons in the hope of continuing to derive maximum profit from them. This was to come to an end with the formal abolition of slavery in the Bamum Kingdom in 1919 by the French colonial administrator Prestat. In the same context, King Njoya issued Royal Edicts outlawing human trafficking and the death penalty, some of which also prescribed the opening up of land ownership to people of servile origins. However, it is curious to note that despite these reforms, the monarchical matrix of the kingdom was maintained. Cameroon's accession to independence in 1960 was to facilitate the process of gradual liberation for the descendants of enslaved persons. It should be noted that the slavery and post-slavery system had created a profound trauma, the repercussions of which would have to be assessed among the victims. Although there was no armed revolt like the one led by Toussaint Louverture in 1791 in Saint-Domingue, there was a sort of symbolic revolt through the various forms of resistance organised by slaves and their descendants to this day. Some socio-cultural burdens observed in the Bamum Kingdom reflect the slow death of slavery system (Lovejoy and Hogendorn 1993). This is reflected in the asymmetrical relationships between the various social components (Mouiche 2005, pp. 378–420), which tend to keep the *Pon Pekpen* in a state of vulnerability and permanent dependence. The effect of this 'vulnerocracy' is that the enslaved people's descendants overwhelmingly support the CDU at the expense of the Cameroon People Democratic Movement (CPDM) because popular opinion continued to distinguish between people of noble class or free origin and those of servile blood (Mbohhou 2023). It is obvious that no one can get rid of their blood without dying. Hence the need to protect human rights in general, and those of enslaved persons and/or enslaved children in particular, by devising mechanisms to fight against the socio-cultural constraints of post-slavery system in a republican context.

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