

Vestiges of Slavery in the Ndop Plain of the Bamenda Grass field of Cameroon

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Abstract: *The paper examines the vestiges and memory reconstruction of slavery in the Ndop Plain of the Bamenda Grassfield of Cameroon as an attempt to reconstruct the history of slavery in that part of the territory. With data gathered from mostly primary and secondary sources and by employing the thematic and historical chronology style of data presentation, the study submits that vestiges played a pivotal role in the memory reconstruction of the past history of enslavement. It further contends that indigenous efforts in the abolition of slavery were only skin-deep as voices of the institution of slavery lingered on with some individuals and indigenous communities holding to or unwilling to terminate the practice. It is as a result of this that vestigial remains in both tangible and intangible forms have survived in Ndop plain in forms of rituals, former enslaved markets and gynecological lineage reconstruction. The paper concludes that these vestiges serve as vital and authentic representations of slave practices in Ndop and gives a better understanding of present day cultural, social, political and economic organisations of the polities in the Ndop Plain.*

Key Words: *Vestiges, Memory Reconstruction, Slavery, Ndop Plain.*

I. Introduction

Though slavery seems to have been terminated worldwide, its vestiges lingered on as some of the slavery institutions defiled time and are still be evident in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the people, Ndop Plain inclusive. Here, slavery was a well-established institution and enslaved persons were not only considered aliens but also treated with disdain. They carried out odd and taboo jobs as well as assignments that were rejected by the non-enslaved persons.¹ They were the downtrodden in society, voiceless and had no protection at all. In short, they provided unpaid economic and social services within their communities. Slaves were acquired from wars as captives, through raids, kidnappings, pawning, theft and betrayals and so could be disposed of or sold and even killed without any consequence.

However, the advent of Christianity and other aspects of the so-called western civilization garbed in colonialism, greatly contributed to the decline of slavery in the Ndop Plain. The presence of the first German missionaries in the area around 1907 and adherence to Christianity by some indigenous people (especially some elites who owned slaves) changed the state of affairs in the Ndop Plain. Christian values were impacted unto converts as they were called upon to live in the fear of God and the love one another unreservedly. Through their activities, many slaves were emancipated. This does not mean that indigenous efforts towards abolishing the practice of slavery were nonexistent before the coming of missionaries. Other indigenously generated factors worked for the eradication of enslavement practices in Ndop.²

The persistent emphasis of missionaries that the practices of slavery and slave trade were unhealthy and their persuasion of many people to abandon the act in lieu of the so-called legitimate trade worked favourably for the enslaved.³ The people of the community progressively abandoned the enslavement of persons and increased their volume of trade in goods and services. The Colonial regimes also brought in some legal tools based on their values that fought the institution of slavery. The Germans, who colonised Cameroon in 1884,

¹ Chamba Kometa. Aged 105, trader (farmer) in discussion with author, Bamumka, 10s/02/2021.

² V, G. Fanso, Cameroon History for Secondary Schools And Colleges, Vol. 1 (London Basingstoke: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1989)

³ Ngri Walter, "Slavery and Slave Dealing among the Oshie People of Njikwa Sub-Division (19th and early 20th Century" Masters, University of Yaounde 1, 2014), 61, 48

began a direct campaign in synergy with mission agencies like the Basel mission to stamp out the enslavement of persons and analogous enslavement practices in their territory. The German law of 1902 which outlawed the enslavement of persons however, did not favour indigenous enslavement of persons; reason why emancipation and abolition had a gap. This German initial lackluster attitude to the abolition of slavery inadvertently credited indigenous abolition efforts which were inherent in the evolution of enslavement practices.

The German out law of enslavement was criticized in 1916 when German imperial rule was forcibly terminated. W.E. Hunt, the British Assistant D.O. for Ossidinge reportedly described the German attitude (under Mansfield) towards slavery in the Banyang country and the Cameroon territory as,

The Germans prohibited the practice of enslaving but did not alter the status of those who were already in the state of slavery. The system in this Division is the same as that previously obtaining in Nigeria prior to the abolition of the house rule except that there are definite slave villages usually off the main tract and some distances from the other village⁴.

The departure of the Germans from Cameroon and the coming of the British in 1916 brought more changes. In relation with her Indirect Rule Policy, a Native Court was established in Bamenda in 1917 and this legal entity could take charge of gross human rights abuses. This signal meant that the institution of enslavement was in trouble. It could either disappear or take another form. In spite of the progressive change in the status of enslaved persons there was resistance to their change in status.

The main resistance came from enslavement masters who saw abolition as intruding into their private affairs. They manifested their resistance by being aggressive to anyone who complained about their relationship with enslaved persons. Some prevented their family members from having anything to do with the church and the mission stations. The next level of resistance was to disguise enslavement practices. Enslavement was not very open but the enslaved was still bonded to the master in one way or another. He was required to pay a yearly harvest to his master greater than the usual farm ownership recognition paid by others. They were required to carry out certain assignments for the master without a reward. He was at the beck and call of the master. Fawo for instance intimated that his father could instruct them to send Jean, his slave, to run errands for him at any time of the day. The enslaved only had to comply. This was the beginning of another form of enslavement. This institution was developing several variants that could not be easily recognizable, but the mechanism of self-destruction had set in. It could take longer than expected to end as the practices kept changing and challenging the community.

At independence, the government of Cameroon also did much to terminate slavery by using several legal instruments and actions. The Ndop Plain was punctuated albeit sparsely, with these visible and invisible vestiges. According to Anna and Lucia, African legacies were used as confederate symbols that were placed in front of state capital, African centered arts, religious practices and cultural traditions viewed as vestiges of slavery.⁵ After many years, the institution of slavery in Ndop had some relics to support the existence of the phenomenon. These vestiges range from remnants of economic (slave markets) to socio-cultural (linguistics bearings, name and meaning of the word slave, rituals and genealogical lineages) activities of slavery in the Ndop plain found in Ngoketunja in the North West Region of Cameroon, located between latitude 5° 42 and 6°10 North of the equator and longitude 10° 11 and 10° 40 East of the Greenwich meridian hosting thirteen polities namely Bamessing, Bamali, Bamunka, Babungo, Bambalang, Balikumbat, Bamumkumbit, Bafanji, Baba1, Babessi, Bangolan, Bali Gasu and Bali Gangsin.

II. Economic Vestiges of Slavery in the Ndop Plain

Markets remain one of the most important vestiges of slavery in Ndop Plain. The markets were mostly located on the north east and western borders of the settlement where slaves were traded. Some of the markets included the *Iwing Ngoo (Stone market)* and due to its temporal character, it was under trees and only stones were found in this market. All persons to this market sat on stones and the market lasted only for few hours. By midday the market closed.

⁴ Fomin and Ngoh p, 30

⁵ Anna, Arouja, Lucia, African heritage and memories of slavery in Brazil and the south Atlantic world, Amhert: Cambia Press, (2015), 422.

Figure 2: Line up of stone stools in one of the slave markets

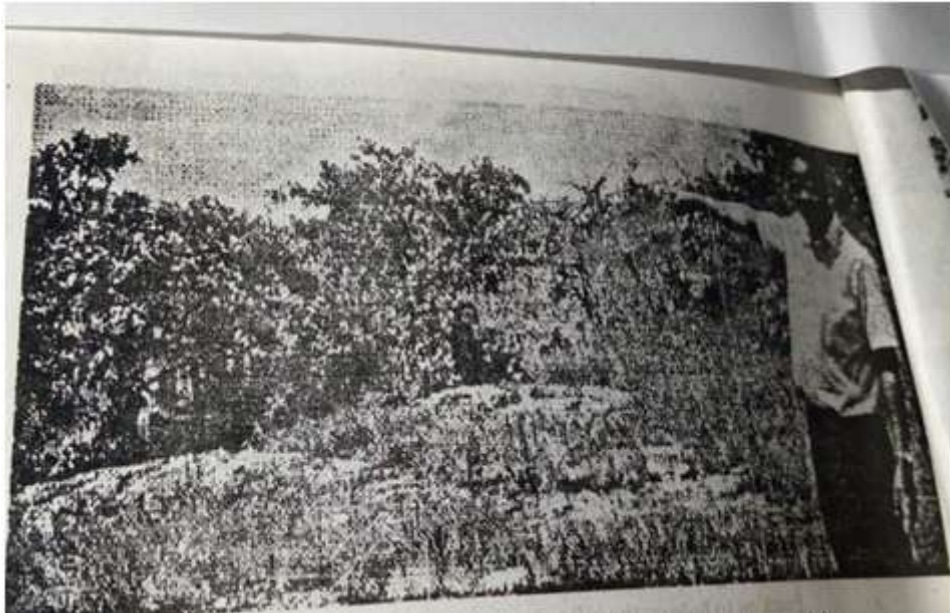


Source Source: Researchers field work 04/03/2022

The nature and operation of the market probably reflected the nature of the sales in that area. Its temporal nature indicated that the market could have been stormed by counter raiders at any time. Trading was done early in the day so as to finish transactions and permit buyers move with their slaves faster. This market was found in Babungo to the west of the village. Figure 2 shows the line of trees and a line of stones still visible at the slave market. These stones were used by the slave owners and slave traders as sitting positions. The stones were placed under huge trees where the persons to be sold for enslavement were tied. The position under huge trees was in a bid to shade the traders from rain and sunlight. It is important to note the semi-circle formation of the stones. A similar market was found further north of the plain toward Oku, this was known as the *Iwing Ngai (Big market)*. This market held weekly. The Bamunka slave market was situated behind the *Noketunjia* hill. Its location behind the hill and far from the population was to hide its nature of activities and was at a good location for moving captured persons out of Ndop plain to the Bamenda central polities. Figure 3 shows the pre-colonial slave market that was situated in the hills of Bamunka. The market was situated up the hills for security purposes. It gave a vantage point for the slave raiders to see if any counter raiding team was approaching. Secondly, it was difficult for the hill to be easily accessed. The third reason is that it was situated between Bamunka and Kom. Kom was a major slave source serving this area. Fourthly it was a transit slave market to other slave markets in the north east of the Grassfield. It served as a meeting point for Bamessing and Babungo areas where both slave holders and slave traders communed for their transactions⁶. The market in Bamunka had a cave in which unsold slaves could be kept overnight as can be seen in figure 4 below. Another slave market existed at Bamali which served as a main market for slaves from the polities to the east of the plain.

⁶Wuteh Alfred, 78 years (traditional councilor) in discussion with Author, Bamunka, 06/04/2021.

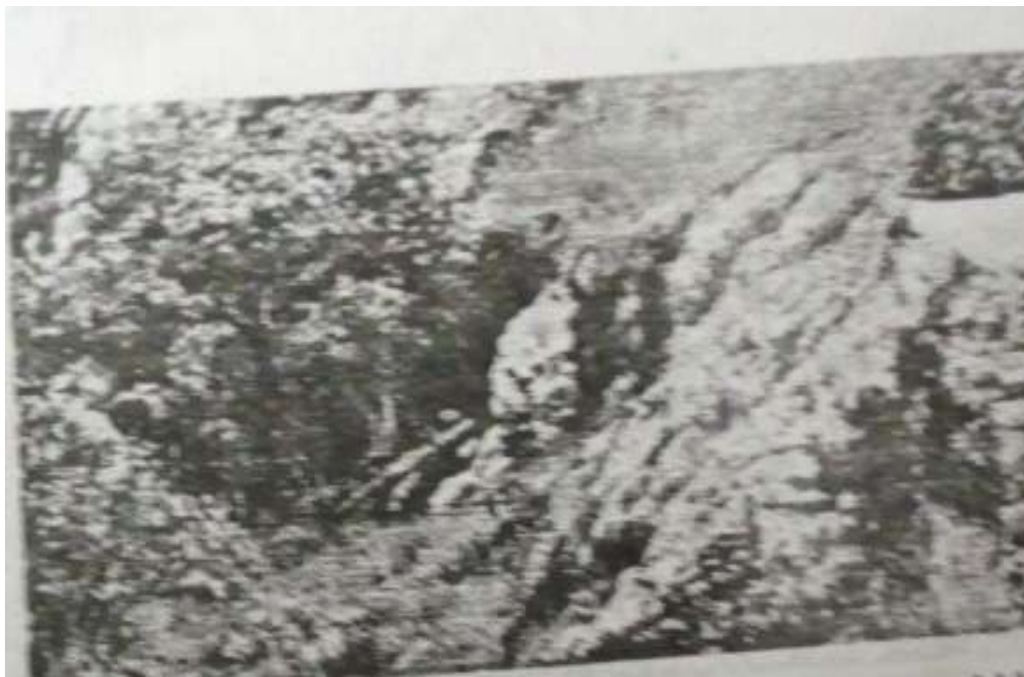
Figure 3: Remnants of Slave Market on Bamumka Hill, Ngoketunjia



Source: From Nwana's Collection. 1997

Figure 4: shows the storage area around the market. Here, traders kept those whom they had bought to be moved to their communities. On their way, they could barter the enslaved persons to other enslavers or interested persons. Some enslaved persons, took on their heels while their keeper was asleep⁷. Enslavers hardly displayed all persons in captivity, some were hidden in caves, forest galleries and some secret forest, see figure 4.

Figure 4: Area at the Slave Market for Storage of Enslaved Persons



Source: From Nwana's Collection 1997

⁷Wuteh Alfred, 78 years (traditional councilor) in discussion with author, Bamumka 06/04/2021.

The captured persons were at times tied to these trees especially the recalcitrant ones. The dwindling of this once thriving institution has resulted in either the disappearance of some of these markets while others have changed forms. The market behind *Ngoketujia* has disappeared while the *Iwing Ngai* became the main village market, the *Iwing Ngoo* became a cultural market and the Bamali market has become the road junction settlement. Vestigial remains were also embedded in aspects of cultural rituals of the Ndop plain.

III. Socio - cultural Vestiges

The remnants of slavery in Ndop Plain was depicted in the socio-cultural activities of the people such as rituals, language, names and meaning of the word slave and genealogical lineages. Before the arrival of the colonial masters in Africa in general and Cameroon in particular, Africans practiced and worshipped according to their customs and traditions. As a whole, their social belief was an integral part of the kind of gods they worshipped, their perception of death and how these events were celebrated. Every society had its own god and their perception of death varied from one culture to another. In pre-colonial Ndop Plain customs, death and burial rites were associated to angry ancestors, misfortune, misdeeds or witchcraft with the exception of old people whose death was considered a natural occurrence. The united factor on how the Ndop plain perceived their death was that they believed in communication between the living and the dead.⁸This kind of belief in ancestors occupying an important position in the lives of the living influenced the burial practices of the people. For example, burying someone in front or behind a house had a different meaning in Bamumkumbit from pre-colonial times till recently⁹. In Bamunka people were buried in one chosen room of the living house¹⁰. While in Bamabalang, a dead married woman was buried beside their fireside. This was, in their perception, to honour and keep her body warm.¹¹The advent of Christianity and sensitization campaigns from some civil society organisations helped to greatly mitigate the intensity of this practice such that it became difficult to identify any marked difference between the freeborn and those from slave backgrounds in terms of burial rites

In Babungo polity, people were buried in varied locations as some special attention was accorded them. Some persons were buried in their family graves while others were buried in community graves. With the arrival of missionaries, there was the introduction of mission graves reserved only for Christians¹². The main reason for the mission graves was to prevent the Christians from performing those burial rites and rituals they preached against. Prince, Princesses and Fons had a special and sacred burial place. This was in a cave or a sacred place where only the regulatory society members could approach. The notables were buried in their compounds while the commoners and enslaved were buried in the communal burial grounds.

The community believed in ancestral worship, so special attention was paid to the graves as sacrifices were conducted on regular basis as the family deemed necessary. After a period of about five to seven years, the family of a deceased organized an event in which the skull of the one-time dead family member was exhumed and kept by the head of the lineage. Over time, such a practice disappeared in some families and was replaced by the practice of using a stone, which was placed on the forehead of the dead person and jealously kept at a family shrine or in one of the inner rooms of the family compound.¹³ The practice was non-discriminatory as the enslaved went through the same process.¹⁴ Enslaved person had no option in this case as the heads of the relatives could not be found. They overcame this hurdle by going to the routes that led to the polity from the direction from they suspected they were brought from and collected a stone to signify their lineage. The royalty was not exempted from the above but had theirs celebrated in the palace, while the notables celebrated theirs in small huts around their compounds. The symbolic stones were kept in the family shrines by the lineage head. These lineage heads consulted the spirits as occasion demanded and was done at least once a year. This was usually accompanied by a feast which was presumed to appease the spirits of the dead relatives. Nyonghati beefs up this as she posits that:

The Bali man was convinced that the cause of bad death may be attributed to wicked ancestors, witches or any other human being. God can not cause a bad death because the Balikumbat man acknowledges the goodness of God. He has accepted the presence and the influence of ancestors upon human being as an individual and upon the society as a whole. There was a belief that the spirits of

⁸Barlett, B.A, "Healers and Witches in Oku: An Occult System of knowledge in North WEST Cameroon", (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Carolina, USA 2006)96.

⁹Grace Nghogule, 48years, (Teacher), in Discussion with author, Nkwon 24/05/2021.

¹⁰Wuteh Alfred 78years, (Teacher), in discussion with author, 06/04/2021.

¹¹Rika, 50years, (Teacher) in discussion with author Bamabalang 02/04/2021.

¹²Jonas N. Dah, "Basel mission station Babungo and British Colonial Ndop 1912-2014", 56.

¹³Sylvester Tivecone 77 years, (Tifun Notable/Family Head), in discussion with author Babungo 20/04/2021.

¹⁴Soteh Kometa. 107 years, (Farmer) in discussion with author, Babungo, 11/04/2020

the dead were capable of influencing human beings. The events that happened in the village. For instance, when, the rainy season was delaying or the harvest was poor, if there was an epidemic or that dogs howl at night in the village abnormally, the villagers concluded that the ancestors were speaking to them through these events¹⁵

In the event of sickness or death of a member of the family, irrespective of whether an enslaved or freeborn, the head of the family immediately summoned a family meeting and organized for an appeasement ritual to be performed. All members of the family were expected to be present and take active part in all its deliberations. The reason for this ritual exercise was to appease the ancestors who were considered angry with the family. Both the non-enslaved and enslaved persons were to effectively take part in this ritual exercise. This claim had been supported by Drummond Hay who recorded that, when any member of a family fell ill, the relatives often thought that their dead father or some other dead relative was responsible for the person's sickness.¹⁶In this light an appeasement ritual had to be carried out to get the sick person recover from the illness. The lineage head had to sacrifice fowls, goats which were killed and their blood mixed with salt and oil and sprinkled on the grave of the dead person.¹⁷ The general belief by the family members was that the sick person would get well immediately after the ritual.¹⁸ The violation of the ritual by any member of the family, according to traditional norms was to be the cause of another serious sickness or even the death of another family member. These traditional religions consequently guided the moral norms. These norms were supposed to be strictly respected by all members of the community because any voluntary disrespect might cause a serious illness or death of the one who violated the norm. In this light, those with misfortunes and strange illnesses were expected to make open confessions of the reason for their predicaments. In an event where the cause of the illness or death was discovered, the concerned individuals were purified through ritual sacrifices, libations and incantations in order to appease the gods or ancestors to reverse the situation.¹⁹Rituals that were performed in some communities were transported by enslaved persons from their source area to the area of settlement. It was uncommon in some polities of Ndop to hear that, the exhuming of skulls was not a practice of the Bamumgo and Bamessing people but that an item of the late man was kept (the drinking cup or a kitchen or farm implement) in the case of a woman. They claimed that the skull issue came from the east indicating the Bamun and the Bagham areas. They were families in the polities in Ndop that did not have lineage heads to perform various rituals for them as they were not biologically related to their masters. This relationship that was not based on consanguinity, indicated that they were slaves and were treated as such by some families till date.

The belief of the strong arm of the ancestor on the life of the people called for the appeasement of the spirits through ritual celebrations. The ancestral spirits were able to exert both good and evil influences on the living, yet they were never seen except in dreams. Dreams were attributed to the spirits of the ancestors and so, possessors of dreams had to go to a diviner to have the dream interpreted and be told whether it carried an evil omen or it was a fruitful dream.²⁰ In case the dream carried a bad omen, the concerned was told what sacrifice he had to perform in order to appease the ancestors and avoid any eminent danger, there was danger if the relationship was not cordial. The anger of the spirits could lead to several forms of misfortune, ranging from serious illnesses to death. A cordial link between the living and the dead caused the spirits to provide blessings for the families and community as well.²¹ The celebration of the dead was performed by both the non-enslaved and the enslaved persons of Ndop plain.

The non-enslaved carried out the celebration of their death relatives in the family compound. This event came up yearly as per the dictates of the respective families. Some families accumulated the yearly celebration and organized them in some special event as circumstances permitted. In the event of a death celebration, the men and women had the opportunity to show case their varied talents. The women on their part were given the latitude to prepare some food for the population that was expected to commune for the

¹⁵Rachel, Nyonghati, "Women in the History of the Bali ChambaOfCameroonCa 1830-1958", (The University of Yaoundé I), 2016,259.

¹⁶Drummond Hay "An assessment report of the clans of the Bandop area in the division of Cameroon" NAB, File No E.P 1282, (1925).

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸KometaChamba, 110 years, (Trader) in discussion with author, Bamunka 03/01/2021.

¹⁹Jonas N. Dah (Ed) Basel Mission Station Babungo and British Colonial Ndop 19/2-2014.

²⁰ Bermbuh Scholastica, (*Slave Trade and Slave Practices in Babungo* ca. 1800-1907) MastersDissertation, The University of Bamenda, 2018, 94.

²¹ Drummond Hay NAB, File No Ab 23, 1473/25, 1473/25, 1925.

celebration. The women prepared corn fufu to be eaten with chicken and fish sauce, pounded cocoyams and fish source, rice and sauce, porridge plantains and others. The women were also required to organize themselves in the different dance groups for the ceremony, these women, both the enslaved, and non-enslaved were expected to thrill the population with various dance groups. The women who were already grouped in their different farming associations and women societies, arranged themselves and appeared in the court yard for different performances. The onlookers applauded the women and some gifts were shared to them²².

Non enslaved and enslaved males were expected to supply drinks, kola nuts and sitting positions for all and also to arrange themselves for the different traditional dances and juju groups. This was in a bid to make proper arrangements to thrill the family members, in-laws, friends and on lookers to the said date of the celebration²³. The men on their part, organize themselves in dance groups like the masquerade dance groups which took turns in the courtyard and thrilled the population. The family members each requested the performance of a dance group as tradition and custom demanded. Food and drinks were served to the dance groups. The bulk of activities of the appeasements of the ancestors were left on the shoulder of the family head. The major task of appeasement was to be done by him. He took with him an elderly son of the family who accompanied him for this ritual exercise. With them were the items for appeasement; fowl, goat, palm wine, salt, and palm oil, accompanied with some cooked food. These items were placed on the shrine of the family containing stones which represented the skull of the dead family members. It was believed that, this was the resting place of the ancestors and, the items for appeasement would be consumed by the spirits. The celebration of the death was not same with enslaved persons. Here, some form of discrimination and stigmatization was noticed. Families could have their appeasement house as shown in figure 6 but the enslaved kept their appeasement material at a corner of their house or under their beds.

Plate 6: Area of appeasement of gods in Finteng quarters Babungo.



Source: Bermbuh field work 04/09/ 2018.

The appeasement of the ancestors was celebrated following lineages. The lineage head was concerned with the ritual appeasement of his family members. The quarter heads or notables were charged with the ritual appeasement of the quarter. The ritual appeasements of enslaved persons were rarely performed in the compound of their host or where they resided²⁴. The celebrations took place along road junctions. Such appeasements were carried out along areas leading to the supposed direction of the origin of the enslaved. In

²²Tanila Chrysantus, “*History and Traditions of the Bamumkumbit people in the North West Province Cameroon*”.

²³ Ncho Emmanuel notes on the History of Babungo, 1970.

²⁴Soteh Kometa (farmer) 110years, in discussion with author, Babungo.

Babungo for example those who could trace the origin of their ancestors to the north and north east of the polity, carried out this ritual sacrifice along that area²⁵. An example was given of the descendants of enslaved persons whose fathers or grandfathers were brought in from Kom and Mbessa in Oku. Those who carried out their ritual sacrifice at an area called *Kung*, stem from an enslavement background. This example held true of one of our respondents in the person of Nkwang who narrated his family past lineage from Kom.²⁶ Those whose ancestry could be traced to the east of the village, for example Bangolan, Babessi and Nso, carried out their own sacrifice out of the polity east of the river *Mineh*. Once the direction of the origin had been traced, the entire family under the leadership of the family head took off to the place of the sacrifice. The items for sacrifice were gathered together as the women took care of the cooked food. The men on their part brought kola nut, and made sure the fowl, goat, palm oil, salt and palm wine were all set.

At the sacrificial ground, the food was displayed, the animals for sacrifice kept at close range for supervision. The family head with the palm wine, made some incantations, as he poured the palm wine to the ground, reciting the names of all those who were considered ancestors to the family. The process went on for some ten to twenty minutes. The other family members would be murmuring in satisfaction to the family head's incantations. The food was then served in plantain leaves for all present. Their generosity went to passers-by who either took part or just went along as many considered family cleansing as suitable only for the supposed family members.²⁷ The ancestors were served on leaves on the area, while the fowl was slaughtered and the blood sprinkled around the area. The goat was untethered and left to move into the wild. Anybody who found it was free to have it as his game. This ritual exercise went on amongst the Ndop plain polities and had been negatively affected by the introduction and practice of the Christian religion. This negative effect began around the early 20th century, when Christianity was introduced in the plain. Notwithstanding, some families still performed these sacrifices. In all this, the enslaved persons lost their identity as they were forced to work according to the norms and culture of their host population. There was another group of enslaved persons whose descendants could not trace their ancestry neither from the community nor from external traces. This group of persons carried out their ritual celebration in the market where enslaved persons were sold and bought. In this light, such celebrations were carried out in the "Iwing Ngai" and in the "Iwing Ngoog" in the Babungo polity, and the slave market above the Bamunka hill.²⁸ The Tangoh road linking Bamunka and Baba1 was an area for sacrifices by the enslaved around Bamunka. The celebration of the dead was very important to the culture of the community as vestiges lingered in the manifestations. This cultural norm is supported by Anna Lucia who brought out the legacies in Brazil in religious, cultural norms and socio cultural traditions as vestiges of slavery.²⁹ It was elaborated in the cultural jongo festival which was a dance punctuated by hand clapping, drumming and a bonfire typical of Africans.³⁰ The pre-colonial community of non-enslaved and enslaved persons could be visualized in the voices and vestiges that are present in Ndop plain.

As communities held persons against their will, they were termed slaves. These groups of people were enslaved by families into which they were brought and also into communities as enslaved persons. The different communities gave linguistic bearings to the enslaved persons in relation to their linguistic background. An enslaved person was referred to as *Bouh* in Babungo and Bamessing, *Abouh* in Bamumkumbit, *Nkweh* in Baba1, *Kuna* in Bambalang and *Kotsibila* in Balikumbat. This was a foot print left behind by the institution of slavery, the inclusion of the word *Bouh* and *Abouh*, *kuna*, *Nkweh* and *kotsibila* in the vocabulary of some of the polities of Ndop plain attest to a one-time enslavement institution. These words did not only have a meaning but conveyed a message. The words above denoted someone who did the odd job in the community, the persons who worked for long hours without any rest and would not refuse any job assigned to them. There was no compensation for such a job and many other persons would not dare carryout such a job.³¹ When one was assigned a difficult task, comments like "am I your slave", usually spoken in the language of the community could be heard from the reluctant person. In Babungo it was *mehleubouhweehmu*. All difficult tasks were attributed to enslaved persons, so much so that it was difficult to find a non-enslaved person indulging in such difficult job. In Bamessing they would retort "*me ne Bouh a me?*" This clearly refers to the fact that slaves in the past were assigned difficult tasks. As enslaved persons were gradually integrated into the community of non-

²⁵ Christina Ngoteh, (farmer) 65 years, in discussion with author.

²⁶ Soteh, kometa, 110years (farmer), in discussion with author, Babungo 10/11/2020.

²⁷ Christina Sanyi, aged 75 years, (business lady), in discussion with author, Fumeh Frida retired farmer, 86years in discussion with author Babungo, 10/11/2020.

²⁸ Ehanghi Elizabeth, (trader) 86 years, in discussion with author.

²⁹ Anna, Arouja, Lucia. "*African Heritage and Memories of Slavery in Brazil and the South Atlantic World*", (Amherst: Cambria press 2015), 422.

³⁰ Ibid, 423.

³¹ Kometa Chamba, (trader), 110 years in discussion with author. 12/06/2016.

enslaved, these words would refer to any difficult task and not a person. Effim added scholarly meaning to this as he gave a pointer to the difficult job assigned to enslaved persons in the Ejagham community.

Not all of the enslaved persons were sold to the coast. Some of them remained with their new masters who forced them to embark on a particular activity that was risky and hitherto unknown to the indigenes of the village, such as the children of their master. For instance, they introduced to their masters the climbing of tall palm trees in order to tap palm wine and to harvest the palm nuts without cutting the tree.³²

The difficult task of clearing the forest for food crop production, harvesting and production of palm oil was mostly done by enslaved persons. The difficult task of digging ore for the smelters were done by enslaved persons as it involved the risk of the mine collapsing and killing the diggers. The collections of clay for pottery in Bamessing and Babessi also involved considerable risk and so was usually assigned to enslaved persons. In all, the most difficult and risky tasks were reserved for enslaved persons. This phenomenon witnessed a decline with modern tools and remuneration to many jobs.

The presence of some foreign languages in some families in Ndop plain community suggests the presence of some persons who were brought in from different communities into the polities of the plain. There was the use of many different languages in the slave holder's compound by both non-enslaved and enslaved, In Ta Timouh's compound, people communicated in Babungo, Bansa, Bali and Bafut languages. Reason being that, the slave holder kept an enslaved person from the above polities. One of the slave holder's daughters reliably informed us that her mother was an enslaved girl from Nso.³³ She was a slave girl who was brought into the slave market already matured. She spoke her mother tongue and passed it on to her children who in turn connected their descendants to this language as it was a medium of communication in the home. The foreign language was spoken side by side the Babungo language, with the host language taking the pride of place.³⁴ Bafut and Bali languages were also introduced into the compound of an enslaver known as Neba and Colbang respectively. They were slaves from Bafut and Bali respectively.

Kom language was spoken in the Soteh's family as a second language. As the family size increased, Kom language lost its value. Information from the family head, has it that, as the children grew up and interacted with other children, the second language lost its importance and was only heard spoken by the father and the mother.³⁵ Foreign languages are still spoken in many homes around the Ndop plain polities. The presence of these foreign languages is a pointer to the fact that there was protest by those enslaved as they maintained their language of origin. It was also representative of the nostalgic feeling of their origin. There are also compounds in the plain where the children still sing moonlight songs in foreign languages. One could hear Kom songs in Mboukang and Finkwi quarters, Nso songs in Finteng quarters and Wum songs in Ikwindoh quarters which were not related to the Babungo lullaby. All these factualize the presence of a community of persons who were brought in an enslaved in the plain. These songs were sang by young people who were taught by their grandparents. The songs by enslaved person were often melancholic and carried some sorrowful wordings. As the moonlight dance is disappearing and being replaced by the television, this important cultural heritage is fast disappearing. The question one ask is how can this be preserved?

Names with foreign background indicated that there were some persons who came into the Ndop plain from other origins. *Landze* was a name from Nso origin. *Landze* in Nso language meant "no road". Many children were named after 'Landze' close to her fourth generation.³⁶ The above, also applied to the Soteh's whose father was bought from Kom. *Nkwang* is a name from Kom which signifies 'many' while in the Babungo language, it simply means 'put'. '*Kimbi*' in Babungo language means 'owner of the world' which hardly qualifies the status of a slave. It rather fitted the origin of the slave from Kimbi area in Menchum division. These names abound in former slave holders' families and are either in recognition of their origin or in defiance of their former status. Naming of children was very significant in Ndop polity. Names were often given in honour or in remembrance of an old relative and usually to a deceased relative. Once a child was born not long after the passing away of a relative, shouts could be heard that the deceased grand father or mother is back. In the case of enslaved persons, they named their children in relation to the relative they left behind.

In Ndop polities, enslaved persons were often allowed to keep their names indicating some benignity in their treatment. The names they maintained gave them some dignity unlike the transatlantic slavery that resulted in the slaves adopting the names given them by their new masters and which cut them completely from their

³² Ernest Lalah Effim, "Slavery Among The Ejagham Cross River area Of Cameroon 1900-2015", (Phd Theses In University Of Bamenda), 2020.

³³ Fumeh Frida (Farmer) aged 83 year, in discussion with author, Babungo, 12/6/2019.

³⁴ Fumeh Frida (Farmer) aged 83 year, in discussion with author, Babungo, 12/6/2019.

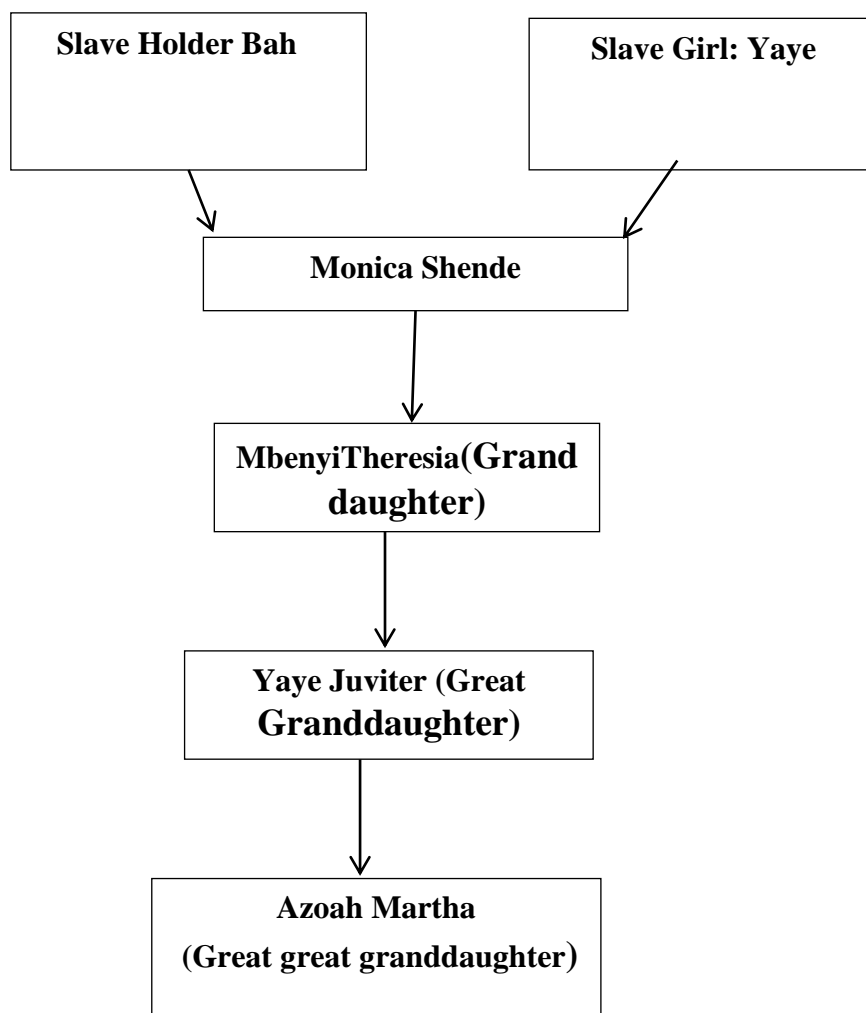
³⁵ Kometa Chamba, (trader), 110 years in discussion with author. 12/06/2016.

³⁶ Fumeh Frida (Farmer) aged 83 year, in discussion with author, Babungo, 12/6/2019.

area of origin. The slave boy Jean who was brought in from Bagham, the French speaking part of Cameroon did not have his name changed. Some of these names had been perpetrated up to the fifth generation. While not being able to conduct DNA to all members of the polity to ascertain their origin, the tracing of the genealogical lineages is a good method to trace the family backward to see if they were descendants of enslaved persons. This lineage tracing equally helped in strengthening family bonds.

Some families were able to trace their family background to the areas where they came from or the first member of the family who was brought to the community as an enslaved person. They maintained names of their family members who happened to have been persons enslaved into the different communities. Enslaved persons have kept records of their history into the collective memories of their descendants. These have been by way of storytelling around the fireside and naming of their offspring's. A few of these genealogical trees will be examined to illustrate the origin of some families in the Ndop plain.

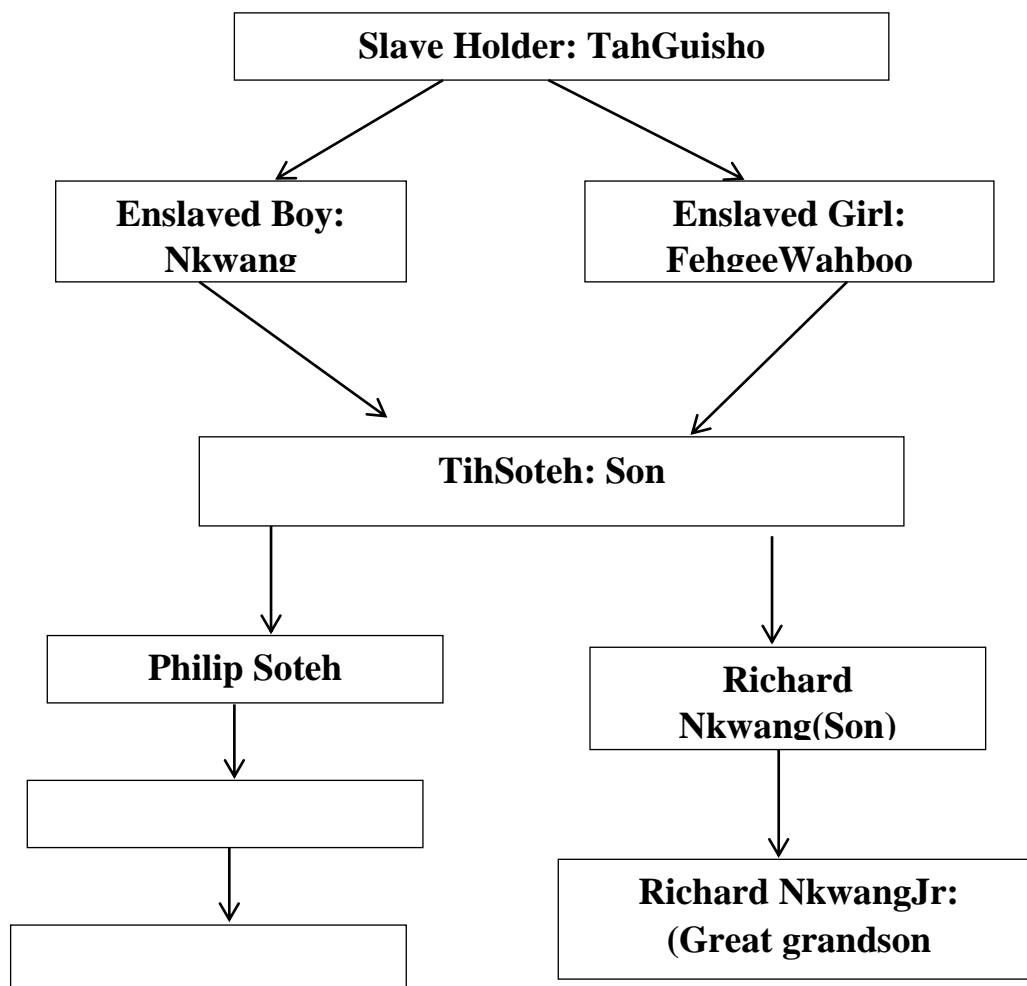
Figure 7: Genealogy of Yaye Family.



Source: Initiative of researcher from interviews with families of descendants of enslaved persons 09/07/2020.

Figure 7 is a family tree of Yaye an enslaved girl from Bamoun enslaved by a notable who later got married to her. Her generations spanned to four in number. The third and fourth generations had no idea that they were descendants from a slave girl. The first two generations were conscious of their origin and related stories about their beautiful mother. They named some of their children with Bamoun *connotation* like *YaBamoun* meaning Bamoun women. Ninety percent of the third and fourth generations had no idea they were from an enslaved descent. Given a life expectancy of 40 years, the four generations would suggest that the enslaved girl was brought to Babungo in ca. 1850s– 1860s thereabout. According to Mbenyi their grandmother who lived up to 70 years and based on the ages of the dead members and the age of the oldest living members we could situate her arrival in the polity between 1840 – 1860.

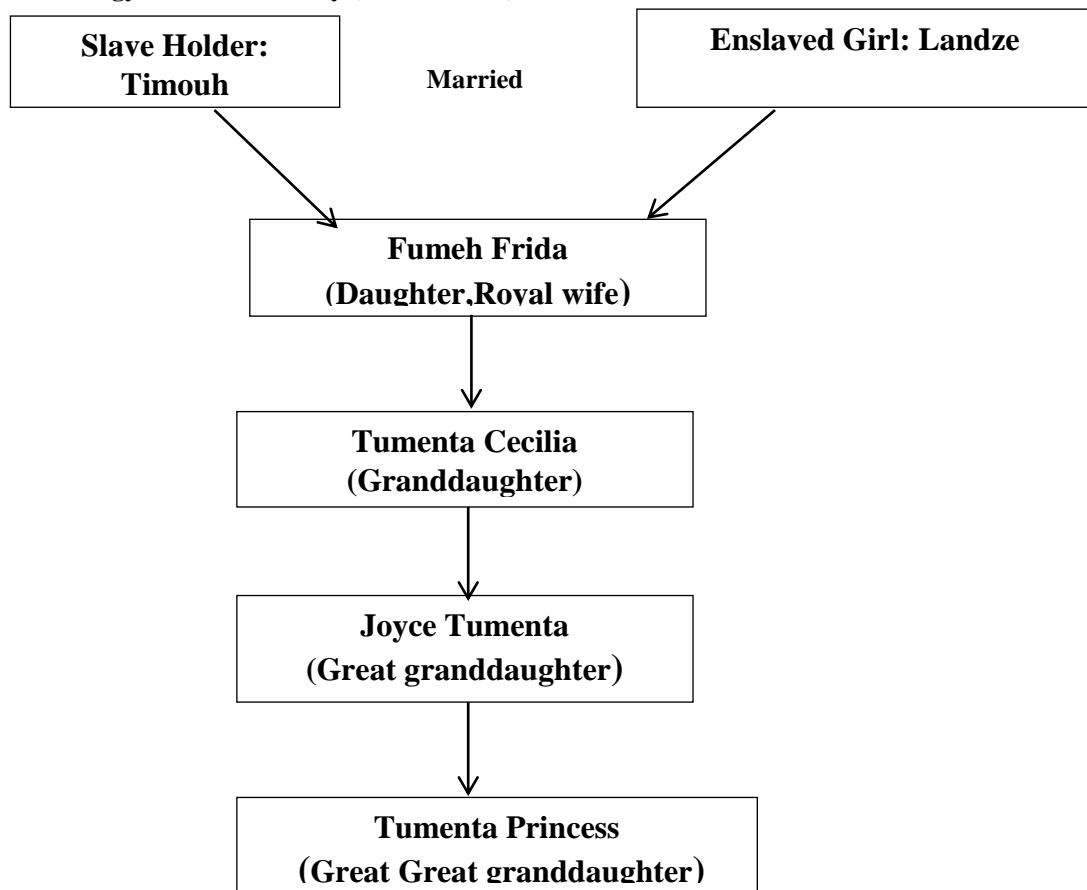
Figure 8: Genealogy of Nkwang Family (CIRCA 1880)



Source: Initiative of Researcher after interview with descendants of former enslaved holders, 08/09/2021.

Figure 8 presents the genealogy of the Guisho’s family that was succeeded by his enslaved boy after the death of his three daughters. During this period, inheritance was to the male and in the absence of a male the male slave was preferred. The Kwang family had a four-generation tree. In the case of this family, ninety percent (90%) of the living generation were aware of their enslaved descent but barely ten percent of the fourth generation knew anything of this descent. This is probably due the fact that they were too young to understand or the scattered nature of the family due to modernization and education made it difficult. It is believed that they came in to the polity almost at the same time like Yaye or a little early. They were found in the same quarter giving evidence for the same enslaver.

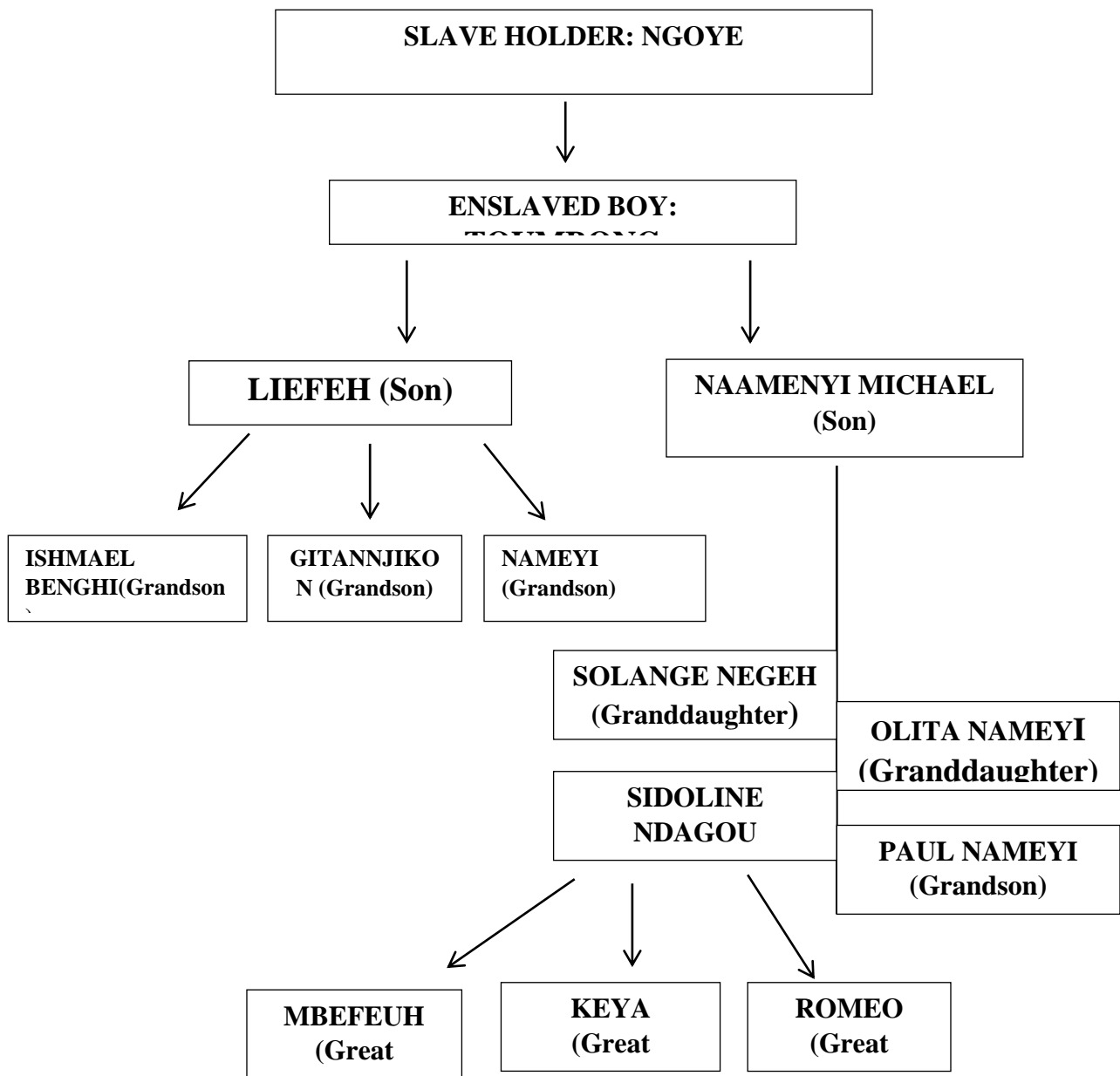
Figure 9: Genealogy of Landze Family (CIRCA 1890).



Source: Initiative of Researcher after interview with descendants of former enslaved. 05/09/2021

Figure 9, presents the case of an enslaved family that moved into the royal family in the second generation and are in their fourth generation. This family kept their slave origin intact and up to the fourth generation was aware that they are descended from a slave family. All of the first three generations were aware of their enslaved descent. The fourth generation was scattered. Seventy six percent (76%) of those interviewed were aware of their enslaved descent. This was motivated by the fact that the children had risen in social status in the verge of prominence. It was a means to showcase their achievement

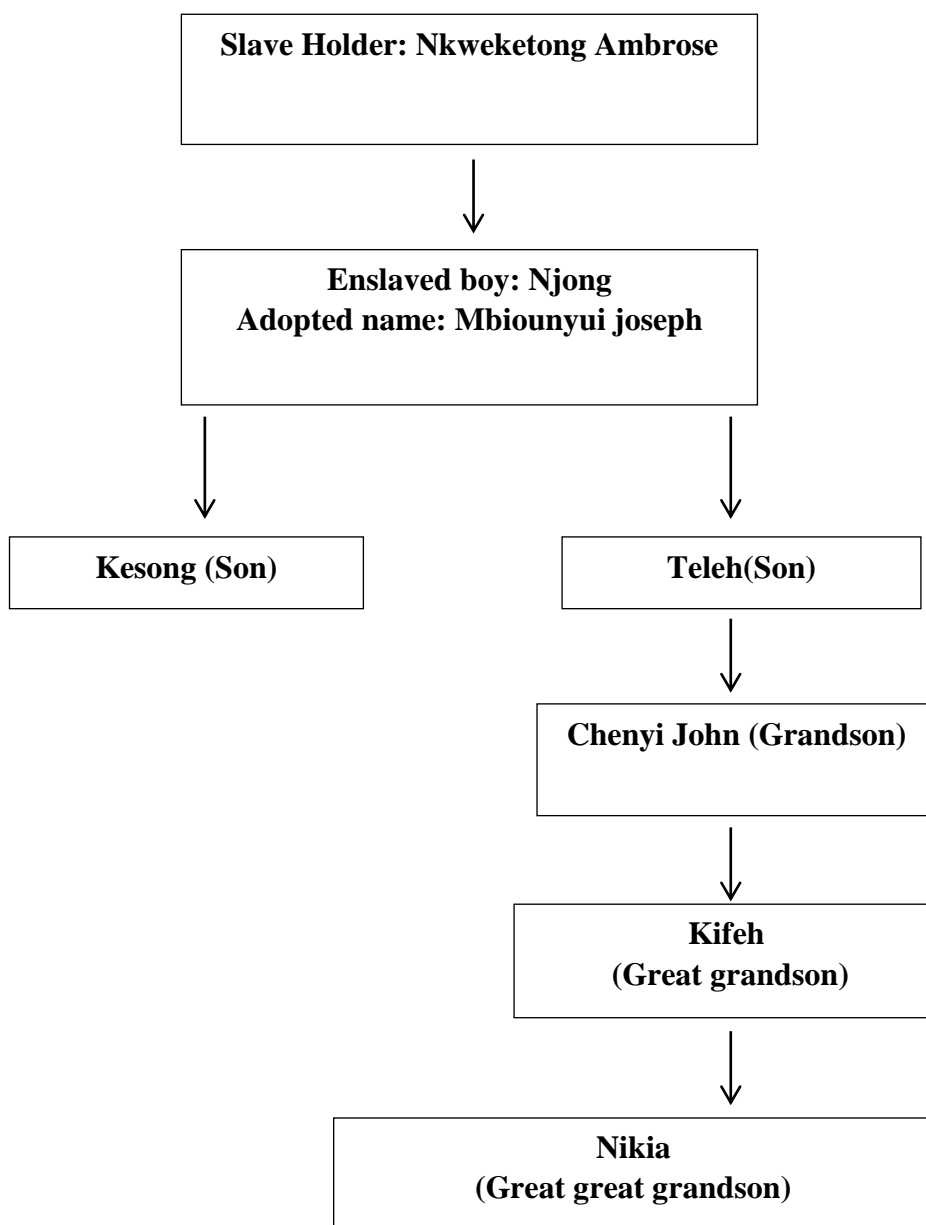
Figure 10: Genealogy of Toumbong (CIRCA 1880) “Bamessing”



Source: Initiative of researcher after interview with descendants of former enslaved 14/09/ 2021

Figure 10 traced the genealogy of Toumbong an enslaved boy from Kom. His slave master integrated him into his family proven by the great seed he left in Bamessing. The Toumbong lineage has four generations. Sixty seven percent (67%) of the first of the two generations were aware of the enslaved decent. The third and fourth generations are widely scattered. Only eight (8%) of this generation know their slave descent. The fourth generations indicated that the colonial era was still very much of enslavement in the Ndop plain polity.

Figure 11: Genealogy of Njong Mbiounyui Joseph Bamessing



Source: Researcher’s Initiative after interview with descendants of former enslave12/09/ 2021

Figure 11 presents the genealogy of Njong an enslaved boy from Widikum. He was brought into Bamessing by Nkweketong Amboise a trader involved in long distance trade. He was adopted as a son and named Mbioungyui Joseph. He got integrated into the community and left behind a large lineage. Njong was brought in from the Widikum area and his name was changed to Mbioungyui meaning the world belongs to God. It is not well understood why his name was changed, but the family is in fifth generation. Eighty-two (82%) of the first two generations interviewed were aware of their former status of their grandparents. The third, fourth and fifth generations were not aware. Not even one of them had an idea. We found it difficult to understand. They were probably scared of a possible stigma or the collective memory was fast eroding.

IV. Conclusion

This paper examined the vestiges of slavery in Ndop Plain. It contends that vestigial remains are imbedded in linguistic bearings, in words and meaning of an enslaved person, ritualistic practices, appeasement of gods and gynecological lineages. With these evidences, it is clear that slavery greatly shaped developments in Ndop Plain and these vestiges are vital for the reconstruction of the history of enslavement in the Ndop Plain.

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