

# EFFECTS OF COMMERCIAL MIGRATIONS ON THE SETTLEMENT OF SOUTH CAMEROON BETWEEN 1840 AND 1887

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**Abstract:** *According to the testimonies of Europeans, only two peoples inhabited the Southern Cameroon between 1840 and 1886: the Batanga of the Atlantic coast and the Benè of the forest. However, the hinterland of the same region, where these two people did not live, has artefacts, marking the continuous presence of the Bantu people since the 16th century. Who are they? From a cross reading of sources, published from 1819 to 2021, the exploitation of the new African historiography and the hypothetical deductive method, it appears that the ethnic groups discovered in Southern Cameroon in 1887, already lived there before 1840, except for one: the Bulu. Invited by the Ntumu people to supplant the beneficiaries of the exchanges on the Kribi coast, they abandoned the savannahs of Upper Sanaga for the Southern region.*

**Keywords:** Migration, settlement, trade, incidence, Atlantic coast.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, the notion of settlement means: "the action of the public authorities aimed at intervening in the spatial distribution of populations according to some of their social, ethnic, religious or other characteristics, real or presumed". (Desage Journal, Sala Pala, 2014: 17). In other words, settlement would designate a spatial arrangement of the population by the State. In this article, this concept takes on another meaning, that of the action of increasing the number of groups of inhabitants of a place (Larousse online). Indeed, from 1840 to 1886, the testimonies of Europeans present on the Atlantic border of Southern Cameroon only revealed the presence of two peoples: the Batanga of the coast and the Benè of the hinterland (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 534; Bouchaud, 1952: 138). From 1887 to 1890, the German discovered new peoples inside the region during their expeditions. These are the Bagyèli, the Kwasio, the Fang, the Bulu and the "Ewondo" who have been established there for years (Morgen Von, 1893: 95-100). What could explain this increase of the number of population groups in Southern Cameroon from two at least to seven? In order to show the impact of Atlantic trade on the settlement of Southern Cameroon between 1840 and 1887, we have used documents published by Westerners who were in contact with the peoples of Southern Cameroon, their neighbors and relatives between 1818 (Bowdich) and 1890 (Morgen Von). Monographs and other various studies have also been useful to us, as well as the oral tradition. All these sources have been collected, confronted and analyzed through the new African historiography that could be resumed to multidisciplinary and critical comparative approach (Diop: 1984, 97-121; Obenga: 1980, 98, 103 and 105). The exploitation of the above-mentioned sources and methods reveals two hypothesis:

- The settlement of Southern Cameroon from 1840 to 1887 was made up of only two peoples: the Batanga and the Benè ;
- The majority of the current population groups of the Southern Cameroon already settled in before 1840.

## 2. Settlement of Southern Cameroons from 1840 to 1887

This part analyzes the testimonies of Westerners on the settlement of Southern Cameroon between 1840 and 1887.

## 2. The Atlantic coast

The French did not remain deaf to the call of the coastal inhabitants: in 1842, the king of the Banôh in Kribi, near Batanga, signed a treaty by which he ceded land to King Louis-Philippe asking him to build a fort there. This treaty will be ratified and renewed periodically under the Second Empire and the Third Republic. For example in 1869 and 1883 (we find these "Banoho treaties" in the archives of the FOM) but never followed by effect (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 208).

This source shows that the Batanga people were living in Kribi since 1842 and even before because they already owned lands there. With the same idea, a British Consul named Hutchingston, who scoured the coast of Central Africa from 1850 to 1860, said the seaside of Southern Cameroon was inhabited by the Batanga who had begun to trade with Westerners in 1840 (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 534). Bouchaud added that the Batanga hinterland forest was empty (Bouchaud, 1952: 138). According to some Eyewitness, the Batanga people lived alone in Kribi until 1895, when a new population arrived in the city, the Mabi:

In 1895, Father Koenig made an attempt at evangelization among the Mabea, but they were in full migration, an attempt was made to send the young boys to Kribi, but these, less strong and less numerous, were frowned upon by the young people. Batanga. A school will be opened for them in Mpango. On Sunday at mass in Kribi, the children have a special place in the church. Later. Mabea and Batanga will make their first communion together. Eventually everyone will end up fraternizing. (...). It was not until 1900, when the Kribi-Yaoundé road was opened, and the administration forced Mabea and Ngumba to settle on the road, that the Kribi mission opened schools at km 4, km 25, km 41 and even at km 62 (Criaud, 1989: 41-42).

If the idea showing that the Batanga people were living alone in the coast of Southern Cameroon between 1840 and 1895 has some proofs, few anachronisms undermine it. For example, it is very surprising that the missionaries were not aware of the presence of the Mabi in Kribi before 1895 when the German colonial administration put down one of their revolts from the 15 to the 22 of March 1893. In the campaign, Germans deployed great resources: 80 police officers, mostly from Douala, 600 Bakoko fighters supported by field guns. During this crackdown, the German officer, Kanzler Wehlan, used scorched earth tactics, murdering the Mabi and burning down their villages. He even hanged the three rebel leaders: King Majesse, King Benga and King Massili (respectively Biang Buo Mbumbo, Biwée Nagya and Nagyan Kwamba) on March 22, 1893<sup>1</sup>.

Moreover, nowadays researches disregard that the coastal Bantu of the South region perceive Pygmies, in their traditions, as the first inhabitants of the seaside and their first partners are the Kwasio people. In addition, the Mabi people hold firmly that they are the first inhabitants of the Southern Cameroon coast that they reached between the 16th and 17th centuries (Ndtoungou-Nzambi, 1999: 23). Similarly, the same ignorance concerns the historical reality that there was in Douala between the Duala and the Basaa people then in Gabon between the Mpongwè and the Ndiwa. The former would have evicted the latter from their lands (Bucher, 1975: 59-89). Indeed, people living by the sea of Kribi refer to a hero who would have led them there. Among the Batanga (the Bapuku and the Bano' o in particular), the genealogies going back to these heroes were collected by a French ethnologist named Madeleine Richard. By applying the method of calculating genealogies most accepted in ethnology, that of Marcel Mauss which stipulates that three generations of people live for a century (Mauss, 1926: 16-17), the ancestors of the Batanga called Ngonga Ya Eko (Bano' o) and Ebadane Ya Ndamese (Bapuku) were born around 1725 and 1744 respectively (Richard, 1970: 141-142). These dates are recent compared

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<sup>1</sup>Colonial Archives, 3294-3295, DZP, Uechtritz-Expedition in das Hinterland von Kamerun, Band 1: Feb. 1893 - Aug. 1894.

to 1568 marking the birth of Bigio Nguimba who have led the Mabi to Kribi<sup>1</sup>. The difference between the date of birth of Bigio and that of Ngonga Ya Eko, the oldest among the Batanga heroes, is 157 years. This time gap would mark the approximate period that would separate the discovery of the sea by the Mabi and the arrival of the Batanga in the Southern Cameroon coast.

Apart from comparative mythology, the onomastics in the districts of Kribi and Campo suggests that the Mabi are the first Bantu inhabitants of these places. First the toponymy of these towns (Mboum, 2021: 31-35), including the space located between the Lokoundjé and Nyong rivers where Germans expropriated the Mabi in 1910:

This project will nevertheless be implemented in 1910. Taking as a pretext a disagreement which arose between some Mabi and Bakoko at Bivuba, the German administration accused the two peoples of getting ready to confront each other and decided to uproot all the inhabitants of the Mabi villages of Pama, Bivouba, Bikoui, Bipaga, fifinda as well as those of the Bakoko-Bassa village of Mbébé. Only the old women remained. Those who resisted were shot. This is how entire families were wiped out and the survivors deported and sent to the German plantation areas of Tiko, Mundemba, Kumba, Victoria, Njombé etc. (Mboum, 2021: 83).

The Mabi populations of the city of Kribi (Mboom, 2021: 71) received some descendants of these deportees of 1910, who were fleeing the war in the English-speaking zone, in 2018 with large astonishment.

Then, a teacher from the University of Nairobi in Kenya, J. C. Sharman and Pierre Alexandre raised in 1964 and 1965 a problem. This involves identifying the people who created the word *mang* (mán), determining its etymology and reconstructing the history that led to its genesis. Starting from the observation that the etymology of this term is unintelligible among the Bantu, Alexandre supposed that the existence of this word was due to the Arabic language. *Mang* in Arabic would designate the sea. Like *banga* (bángà) indicating Indian hemp, this term would have passed from Arabic to Swahili in the form of *manga* and from Swahili to bulu (Bantu A72a) in *mang* (Alexandre, 1965: 532-533). Yet, according to the Kwasio<sup>2</sup>, the word *mang* would have been born because of the geographical shape of the mouth of the *Kièngué* River (current *Kienké*). Indeed, during their migration from Bipindi for the lands in the western direction, the Mabi heard, from the *Dèmbè* quarter (current *Dombè*) in Kribi, a deafening noise and regular. Frightened, they sent a Bagyeli scout to find the source of the noise. On his return, the Pygmy reported that he saw two vast spaces of sand on either side of the mouth of the Kienké River. The latter would be the source of the noise because, not far from there, it continued in the form of an immense and seemingly endless expanse of water. The Pygmy then baptized the place where the Kienké became immense: *mang madzio* (mán madzió),

Literally, *mang* (mán) indicates two vast spaces of sand or two beaches and *madzio* (màdzíó) means: water, waters and expanse of water. In the Kwasio language, the plural of nouns is mainly done with the nominal prefixes *bo*, *bi*, *ma* and *mi*. Examples: *fu* (fú); fish, *bofu* (bòfú); fish, *gio* (gìjò); the shea tree, *bigio* (bìgìjò); shea trees, *siang* (síàn); the mangrove, *massiang* (màsìàn); mangroves and *nshuong* (nshúó); the intestinal worm or earthworm, *minshuong* (mìnshúó); intestinal worms or earthworms. However, there is a nominal class that includes the singular gender and the plural gender with the phonemes (d) and (m) respectively as nominal prefixes. Examples: *daa* (dáá); the crab, *maa* (máá); crabs and *dong* (dò); the well, *mong* (mò); the wells. The term *mang* belongs to this nominal class because it is the plural form of the word *dang*, which designates a large area of sand (a beach) or mud. The original and etymological meaning of the term used to designate the sea among the Kwasio (*mang madzio*) would therefore be the two wide sandy shores of the stretch of water. Later, the Kwasio contracted *mang madzio* in *mang* just as they made *Kièngué Nguè* become *Kièngué*. After this

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<sup>1</sup>Colonial Archives, 104, CSN, A. Minkua Ntunga, "Genealogical list of my family", 1-2.

<sup>2</sup>Interview with R. Guga, retired fisherman and Patriarch of the Mabi, Kribi, 05/01/2003, 118 years old.

term *mang*, they invented another that also derives from the word *dang*. It is *danga* (dánɡà), meaning the salty seawater different from *madzio* (màdzíó) or fresh water from rivers (Bouh Ma Sitna, 2017: 229-230).

From the data analyzed above, it appears that the coastal settlement of Southern Cameroon was made up, from 1840 to 1887, of at least three peoples: the Batanga, Bagyèli (Pygmies) and Mabi. What about hinterland?

### 3. The hinterland

“Between 1850 and 1860, the British Consul Hutchingston was informed of the existence of a single people, the Benë, in the forest hinterland of the Batanga, but on both sides of the Nyong River” (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981 : 534). This means, the only group that inhabited the Southern Cameroons hinterland during this chronological range is Benë, according to Western accounts. However, this type of conclusion does not correspond to the testimonies of Westerners outside Southern Cameroon, to a series of technical data as well as to the hypotheses of researchers.

To start, the Benë recognize that they followed the Enoa people into the forest (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 536). According to testimonies from Westerners outside Southern Cameroon, the Basaa were the first to be spotted. Indeed, the writings of European travelers on the Cameroonian coast mention, for the first time, the existence of a Bantu language at the exact location of present-day Douala in 1670. This language, denoted *bascha*, still appeared in nautical charts of 1750. Europeans compared this word to *biafar* shown on the maps of the navigators Ortelius in 1570 and Dis Costaldi in 1644 (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 534). Yet the *Biafra* or *Biafar* have lived in Nigeria for ages. On the other hand, the Basaa pronounce their ethnonym thus: *bascha* (bàfã), consequently,

The Basaa would not have been alone; they would have occupied the Cameroonian forest, accompanied by related peoples, particularly the Bakoko who also live in Southern Cameroon (Dika Akwa Nya Bonambela, 1980: XXVII-XLIII). Their pre-colonial territory stretched from the left bank of the Sanaga River to the right bank of the Lokoundjé: " (...) to the country of the Ngoumba" (Cournarie, 1948: 16) where they would have waged permanent wars at the almost all of the peoples of Southern Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea (Dugast, 1949: 16-18/ Bureau, 1964: 3136-315/ Pouesset, 1904: 3).

After the Basaa in 1670, come, among the peoples of Southern Cameroon, the Kwasio (Bantu A81). They are part of a larger group called *Mfang* (Cournarie, 1948: 19 / Burnham, Copet-Rougier and Noss, 1986: 111). The *Mfang* ethnic group is made up of : the Kwasio (Bantu A81), the So (Bantu A82), the Maka ( Bantu A83), the Koozimé (Bantu A84), the Konabem (Bantu A85), the Mbimu (Bantu A86), the Bumali (Bantu A87) and the Bethen (Bantu A88) (Guthrie, 1948).

These Kwasio were located in the forest of Central Gabon in 1818 by the British Consul Thomas Edward Bowdich. The Mpongwè of the Libreville coast informed him that an intimidating people who controls trade there inhabited the banks of the Ogooué River (Bowdich, 1819: 427-429). After this testimony came that of the Reverend Leighton Wilson. While exploring the Como River in 1842, he located the Kwasio this time in northern Gabon (Leighton Wilson, 1843: 428). Still in the register of testimonies, the Frenchman Fleuriot De Langle was informed in 1867 that the Kwasio, allied to the Fang, and the Batanga (Langle De, 1876: 259), inhabited the regions beyond the right bank of the Muni River.

As far as facts are concerned, the first meeting between Kwasio and Europeans took place on September 10, 1857 when Paul Belloni Du Chaillu met them in the Monts de Cristal in Gabon (Chaillu Du, 1861: 94). Another meeting, much later but very significant, took place on June 14, 1890 between German Lieutenant Curt von Morgen and Chief Ntunga Nziu. Morgen estimated the age of this leader at 22 (Morgen Von, 1893: 100). However, Ntunga Nziu's grandfather,

Nguiamba Mabiama, was already living in Bipindi (Pouessel, 1904: 3) where he was born around 1802 (Bouh Ma Sitna, 2017: 14-17).

These data agree with the work of researchers who make Kwasio and relatives, the first inhabitants of Southern Cameroon (Struck, 1912: 218, quoted by Dugast, 1948: 96/ Bah, 1985: 122 / Alexander, 1965: 546-547). The Maka in particular would have settled on the banks of the Nyong between the localities of Minlaaba and Abong Mbang (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 536). They were later driven back east by the Yebekolo (Geschiere, 1981: 522) and the Bulu (Dugast, 1848: 102). As for the Koozimé, they would have occupied a space between Dja and Lobo, Boumba and Ngoko (Burnham, Copet-Rougier and Noss, 1986: p. 111) and northern Gabon, precisely to the east of the Fang. Koozimé enclaves are still there (Dieu and Renaud, 1983: 449), just as the *Esaman* of present-day Bulu country are none other than the Koozimé people (Dugast, 1848: 106).

After the Basaa (1670), the Kwasio (1818), the Batanga (1840), the Fang constitute the fourth people appearing in the documents of Westerners. They lived along the banks of the Como River when Reverend Wilson (Leighton Wilson, 1843: 238) discovered them. They would have reached Gabon by following the same migratory paths as some Kwasio and the Sékéani: the source of the Ntem River – Ivindo River - Monts de Cristal or from the source of the Ntem for the Ogooué passing through the Ivindo River (Chamberlin, 1978: 441 / Deschamps, 1962: 82).

The period of the Fang migrations into central African forest is not clear, especially when their migrations are linked to that of the Bulu and Beti. Indeed, according to the glottochronology, that determines the time of separation between the languages, the Fang would have separated from the Bulu and the Beti around 1660 (Alexandre, 1965: 527-529). This Bantu A70 branch is the only people of this linguistic continuum who have been cited as intervening in the famous *Pupu war*. This war is known as incessant clashes, between the 17th and 19th centuries in Upper Ivindo that would have existed between the Bakota, Bakwélé, Kwasio, Fang, Bakélé and Ndjem people (Puech, 1990: 127-128 / Cheucle, 2008: 15-18 / Olson, 1996: 59-60).

According to the data mentioned above, many people made up the population of the hinterland of the South region of Cameroon, before and after 1840 – 1887. The Bakoko peoples living on the banks of the Nyong River after the Batanga and the Mabi, the Basaa, particularly Baso'o Ba Ngok, established between the left bank of the Nyong and the right bank of the Lokoundjé River. They were followed to the east of this location by the Enoa and Benë, shadowed by Makaa (which here includes the So and the Bikele). Below all these peoples lived the Kwasio (the Mbumbo) and Bagyèli on an approximate line joining the localities of Bipindi-Lolodorf-Ebolowa-Sangélima-Djoum-Akom2. The Fang (the Ntumu, Okak and Ngoé) occupied the localities around the banks of the South Ntem from the locality of Ebolowa to Djoum and the Koozimé of the western side of the current Dja and Lobo. It is highly probable that the other Bantu of the region whose traces do not exist in European archives such as the Emburi, the Iyassa and perhaps even the Yanda figured in the said settlement, but the evidence is lacking. How did trade on the Kribi coast contribute to upsetting this configuration?

#### **4. Settlement of Southern Cameroon configured by trade on the coast of Kribi**

Trade could be defined as the purchase and sale of goods (products, services, processes). Its impact on migration would depend on six main factors: " (...) the type of country of origin, the type of market in the countries in the countries of origin and destination, the type of immigrants, the extent of the immigrant community in the host country, migration policies, bilateral trade agreements and customs tariffs" (Fenc, 2014: 82). The inventory of these six factors, adapted to the pre-colonial realities of Cameroon, suggests two paths: voluntary migration and forced migration.

## 5. Trade and Voluntary Migrations

According to the testimonies of Westerners, the first people of Southern Cameroon who have been seen in full migration for commercial reasons are Fang. In 1855, the American missionaries Ira Preston and Henri Adams met them in Gabon in an old two-hectare mine, upstream from the Abanga River, in the process of extracting salt. According to them, these Fang often traveled very long distances in search of this precious substance (Preston and Adams, 1856: 44-45). The Fang would not have been the only ones. According to certain oral traditions, the Kwasio would have abandoned the East of Cameroon for the South in order to obtain salt (Ngima Mawoung, 2001: 213).

This essential commodity was rare for lands far from the sea. According to Théophile Obenga, it was obtained by extracting salty mud, by filtering the ashes of grasses and reeds from the marshes or by boiling the saline sources of the rivers. The first grade of salt was for livestock while humans consumed the other two forms. Only, the best of all these types of salt was that obtained by boiling saline springs. People came from distant regions to settle near these salt-water springs in order to make this famous salt and become masters of the trade. This salt was exchanged for food, livestock or luxury items: shells, valuable jewelry, iron or copper wires. In East Africa for example:

Soon, the more adventurous reached the salt springs of Uvinza from which a much more famous salt was extracted by boiling. These saline sources, at the confluence of the Rushugi and the Malagarazi, gave rise, since at least the middle of the century, to a great commercial activity. There, the people of Buha, Unyamwezi (Tanzania) and Arab-Swahili caravans who joined the Indian Ocean from Lake Tanganyika met to make salt and exchange (Obenga, 1989: 269-270).

This information from Obenga reveals the economic importance of salt obtained from salt water. Peoples did not hesitate to travel very long distances to obtain it. In 1866, a Frenchman named Rouillet in turn noted the existence of salt deposits in northern Gabon among the same people. They were all old. For him, the Fang moved towards the coast in search of these salt reservoirs which were rare on the continent and they had known this technique of salt extraction for a very long time (Rouillet, 1866: 276).

After salt, the slave trade was also a reason for trade and the displacement of peoples. Once again among the peoples of Southern Cameroons, the Fang appearing first in the testimonies of Europeans. Although presented as refractory to the capture and sale of slaves because they did not even keep domestic slaves (Leighton Wilson, 1856: 301), the Fang sometimes turned into slavers because they did not hesitate to sell the captives whom they had procured themselves when another people (Chaillu Du, 1861: 94) attacked them. From 1846, a Frenchman named Charles Pigeard noted that the black trade was still flourishing in the villages of the Bakélé and Sékéani peoples inside Gabon and that their wealth attracted the Fang (Pigeard, 1847: 290). Two years later, the American missionary William Raponda Walker made the same observation; the slave trade had so enriched these peoples that it awakened in the Fang the desire to get closer to the whites (Chamberlin, 1978: 436). Objective they reached in 1860 on the coast of Gabon (Winwood Reade, 1864: 151).

As for South Cameroon, the trade consisted of the exchange of the following products: rubber, ivory and copal supplied by Africans against guns, loincloths and salt from European firms (Pouesset, 1904: 6). Among these products, the demand for ivory was higher. The coast of Kribi exported 40 tons annually (Bouchaud, 1952: 132). Traditionally sold in India, ivory interested Europe and the United States from 1820. From then on, its value increased considerably. Its price went from 20 dollars between 1800 and 1810 to 30 dollars in 1841, then 38 dollars in 1848, 70 dollars in 1856 and 80 dollars in 1880<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>[http:// dictionary.sensagent. com. / annees 1820/fr](http://dictionary.sensagent.com/), consulted on 08:06:2010 at 7:14 p.m.

This European demand was a means of rapid enrichment for the people who knew how to hunt the elephant, in this case, the Kwasio. The German Curt Von Morgen witnessed an unusual scene of hunting of this pachyderm by this people (Kasjua [Kwasio]) on June 08, 1890 in Bipindi:

In Bipindi, I also witnessed a new elephant hunting technique. The evening of my arrival, I was doing a reconnaissance tour along the river, when suddenly we heard the beating of tom-toms in several directions. As for the village, I inquired about what was happening, I was told that three elephants were near a nearby stream and that they were preparing to capture them. I asked with astonishment how one could go about it; my companion replied: "the elephant is such a stupid animal that it gets caught in a cage that a fly could tear to pieces". In addition, because of this, I myself realized later: the temporary fence built around them with extraordinary rapidity and where the elephants allowed themselves to be caught was made of very light brushwood a meter high that could be knocked down with a kick. And the elephant, this enormous animal, capable of felling trees one meter in diameter, does not free itself from this enclosure, which a blast from its trunk could put on the ground! The animals remain thus prisoners for fifteen days and sometimes even longer, until they finally succumb under the innumerable bullets that the natives fire at them (Morgen Von, 1893: 96-97).

This means that the Kwasio were a people of elephant hunters, meaning of their ethnonym (Kwasio = ivory hunter) (Kampoer Kampoer, 2011: 72). Morgen relates that they controlled the ivory route (Morgen Von, 1893: 97), precisely between the localities of Lolodorf and Kribi. The trade in elephant tusks is said to have been the source of many voluntary migrations from the interior of the forest of Southern Cameroon to the Atlantic coast. Therefore:

(...) all the Mabéa who remained on the banks of the Ntem joined their racial brothers settled along the coast between Grand-Batanga and Lokoundjé; some by a forest track linking the villages staggered from South to North between Akak and Angalé in the subdivision of Campo up to Bidou III; the others, the Nyabessan-Ebenvok road and substantially the current Boulou road: Ebenvok-Kribi. Even the Mabéa who arrived at the sea as far as Campo followed these interior tracks on which a certain number of them remained (Pouesset, 1904: 5-6).

Apart from the routes described above, two Europeans: Amat and Cortadelas have reproduced two other migratory paths of the Fang, accompanied by a few Mbvumbo. The migration of the Fang of the Yemvam clan begins at the source of the Ntem in Gabon. It goes towards Djoum, precisely to Nkan then south of the district of Sangmélina to Melan, and from Melan to Mboelon, Mvangan, Eves by Meyo-Centre then Ngonebok, Kaba and finally Ngovayang II in South Cameroon. That of the Ngwé or Yengwi, always accompanied by some Mbvumbo, leaves from Mekomo near the town of Oyem and the Woleu River in northern Gabon for Ngovayang II in Southern Cameroon. It passes through Biyi to the northwest of Bitam, Ngonebok, Bilén and Bipindi. These migrations would have taken place, according to Amat and Cortadelas, around 1840 (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981: 99).

## **6. Trade and forced mobility**

Forced mobility can be understood as displacement of peoples under constraint (Larousse, 1874: 355). These migrations are said to be caused by violence, nature, poverty or discomfort (Cambrezit and Lassaily-jacob, 2012: 37). Of these four causes, only two concern us: embarrassment and violence. Embarrassment is a behavior of the victim towards the coercion, while violence refers to the use of force or power to coerce.

With regard to the embarrassment, a migration of magnitude would have taken place in 1890. It is the displacement of the capital of the Mbvumbo of Boung Li (current Bongolo), located between the present localities of Ebolowa and Lolodorf, for Bidjouka. According to the records of the second-degree chiefdom of Bidjouka, the Mbvumbo and Bené peoples were allies. The two blocks would have symbolized this alliance by a particular rite. The remains of a Bené albino

and a Mbvumbo, who had died in the days when this alliance was to be sealed, were split into two parts. They were buried in such a way that the left part of the remains of the Benë was glued to the right part of that of the Mbvumbo and vice versa. From that moment, Mbvumbo and Benë considered themselves as one people (Bouh Ma Sitna, 2017: 88). Traces of the merger between Mbvumbo and Benë exist in ethnology. Philippe Laburthe-Tolra, quoting the German Wirz, denounced the fake genealogies of a certain François Manga who made Mbvumbo, the first cousins of his Benë tribe (Laburthe-Tolra, 1981b: 543)

Said alliance was also maintained by multiple marriages. Thus, Nziu Nguiamba, the chief of the Mbvumbo who managed to stop the advance of the Bulu towards Lolodorf and to protect the main trade route of the pre-colonial period, had given his sister Bouom Nziu to a Benë chief named Fouda Nga Mbida who was under the authority of the superior chief (of the Benë) Etoundi Ayié. Fouda advised the son of Nziu Nguiamba, named Ntunga Nziu, to leave his capital to approach the Atlantic coast that risked being invaded by the Bulu of Nsim Biyo'o and the Ngoués (Fang) of Chief Sakoudou Bibanga, established in Bikoka and coming from Gabon. This is how, following the advice of his aunt's husband, Ntunga changed his capital in spite of himself.<sup>1</sup>

As for the violence, it seems to result from the exacerbated monopoly of trade with European firms held by three peoples to the detriment of two others from the hinterland. The Mbvumbo, Fang and Benë were allies and controlled the ivory route (Morgen Von, 1893: 97). Having become too rich, their goods and locations aroused the greed of the camp of those excluded from the said trade: the Ntumu. These two camps in the hinterland were not long in confronting each other.

According to the oral sources of the Mbvumbo, the Ntumu established in Ambam and Oyem, in northern Gabon, attacked them with the double aim of plundering them and taking their place as intermediaries with the Mabi and the Batanga. As the Mbvumbo and Fang-Okak were armed with guns, they defeated the Ntumu. However, soon, the latter called the Bulu, a related people who still lived in the savannah in 1840 (Alexandre, 1965: 532-533), to their aid. They returned to the charge through a series of conflicts called Oban or war of the allies, they had the victory. These conflicts ended with the rout of the Mbvumbo and Fang-Okak during the battle of Ebemvok, a locality in the district of Ebolowa in Southern Cameroon (Pouesset, 1904: 5/ Kpwang Kpwang, 1989: Chapter II). Mbvumbo and Fang-Okak then ceded all their lands stretching from Dja and Lobo and from Ntem to Mvila. As they fled, they went to two main places. Some took refuge in the north of continental Equatorial Guinea while others escaped by the track linking Ebemvok to Bipindi via the locality of Aloum-Bekom. Still others took the Ebolowa-Efoulan-Abok Ntomba-Assok track. The refugees from the last two tracks settled between Bipindi and Lolodorf along the left bank of the Lokoundjé River. These are the clans: Biwandi, Bimbpalang, Bimbuah, Biwambo, Bingambo, Limanzuang, Bituer, Bindtuana, Bipongli, Biwüan, Biwüèlè, Sambong, Sambuong, Sanwüala, Sassandè, Sassiàng, Samapfua and Sandeng. All these clans were nicknamed Mbvumbo *Pfiébur*i or Mbvumbo last comers in the Bipindi-Lolodorf space (Pouesset, 1904: 5). The Mbvumbo and Fang are not the only victims of the Bulu invasion. By penetrating into the forest of Southern Cameroons to bring help to the Ntumu, the Bulu created a veritable phenomenon of disruption in the settlement before 1840 by pushing back certain Maka and Koozimé towards the East (Dugast, 1848: 102). The conflicts would have shaken the trade because the ivory arrived less and less on the coast of Kribi. Situation which caused the loss of interest of the European firms for this coast with the profit of that of Bata where were other experimented hunters of elephant: Bisio (Cadet-Xavier: 2006, notes 765-772).

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<sup>1</sup>AC, 105, CSN, Letter from Minkua Ntunga, A., Superior Chief of the Ngoumba & Fangs in Bidjouka-Lolodorf, to Mr. Administrator-Mayor, Head of the Lolodorf subdivision, 05/09/1956, pp.1 -2.



## 7. Conclusion

The purpose of the reflection we have just carried out was to illustrate the impact of trade between Europeans and local populations on the initial settlement of Southern Cameroon between 1840 and 1887. To achieve this, we exploited multidisciplinary sources from 1819 to 2021 and the new African historiography. From these sources and methods, it appears that the most accepted hypothesis on the settlement of the region from 1840 to 1887, which makes the Batanga and Benè peoples the only populations of Southern Cameroon in this period, is hardly consistent with the data science and oral traditions. Already, the Frenchman Bouchaud pointed out that the coast of Kribi exported 40 tons of ivory per year and that the sellers, the Batanga, did not hunt elephants. He wondered about the provenance of these elephant tusks when the Batanga hinterland was empty (Bouchaud, 1952: 57). Through scientific data, it appears that the group of actors in this trade were much more numerous: the Ndownè, Kwasio and Fang-Beti complexes. The exponential enrichment of these peoples, who exchanged ivory, palm oil and rubber for salt, guns, cloths and mirrors, attracted the covetousness of the Ntumu, excluded from said trade. In order to enrich themselves in turn, they allied themselves with a related savannah people, the Bulu who invaded almost all of Southern Cameroon and brought down the ivory trade in Kribi.

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### Oral Sources

Names	Profession during the interview	Age	Date	Place
Guga Rene	retired fisherman	118 years old	02/05/2003	Kribi
Mintanguele Laurent	Retired fisherman and village chief Nziou	90 years old	06/17/2009	Kribi
Nanzie Bidimbi Marlyse	Household	52 years	10/31/2006	Yaounde