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The peopling of the Muri Mountains, Northern Nigeria: evidence from linguistics and ethnography

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Summary

The Muri Mountains and the adjacent area of Northern Nigeria is home to a complex mosaic of ethnic groups whose languages are from different language families (Chadic, Adamawa, Jarawan Bantu, Jukunoid, Central Sudanic) as well as including an isolate, Jalaa. The paper synthesises both detailed work on a large corpus of historical traditions recorded in the 1990s, supplemented by reference to published and unpublished sources. This has numerous parallels to the situation in other 'refuge' areas of Africa, most notably the Nuba Mountains. An outline of the complex population history is presented with hypotheses as to the stratification of populations and the dynamic flux and migrations of peoples. The language isolate, Jalaa, may well be the remaining evidence for the earliest layer of population. The first incoming population was probably the Adamawa speakers, followed by Chadic groups. The Jarawan Bantu and the Jukun would have been later and the Kaba Laka, Central Sudanic, the final migration into the area. The ethnography of the region is characterised by exchange of ideas and practices, as well as linguistic and cultural restructuring. In contrast to other areas of Africa, the Muri Mountains have remained almost unknown to the broader research community.

Résumé

Les monts Muri et la région adjacente du nord du Nigéria abritent une mosaïque complexe de groupes ethniques dont les langues appartiennent à différentes familles linguistiques (Tchadique, Adamaoua, Jarawan Bantou, Jukunoïde et Soudanais Centrale), et comprennent également une langue isolée, le Jalaa. Cet article synthétise un travail approfondi mené dans les années 1990 sur un vaste corpus de traditions historiques, complété par des références à des sources publiées et inédites. Cette situation présente de nombreux parallèles avec celle d'autres zones refuges d'Afrique, notamment les monts Nouba. Un aperçu de l'histoire complexe de cette population est présenté, accompagné d'hypothèses sur la stratification des populations et les flux et migrations dynamiques des peuples. La langue isolée, le Jalaa, pourrait bien être le dernier témoignage de la première strate de population. Les premiers arrivants étaient probablement les locuteurs de l'Adamaoua, suivis par les groupes Tchadiques. Les Jarawan Bantous et les Jukun seraient arrivés plus tard, et les Kaba Laka, de langue Soudanais centrale, la dernière vague de migration dans la région. L'ethnographie de la région se caractérise par des échanges d'idées et de pratiques, ainsi que par une restructuration linguistique et culturelle. Contrairement à d'autres régions d'Afrique, les monts Muri sont restés quasiment inconnus de la communauté scientifique internationale.

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1. Introduction

Nigeria is by far the most ethnolinguistically complex country in Africa, with more than 520 languages, and is a point at which three major phyla, Niger-Congo, Afroasiatic and Nilo-Saharan meet and interact, comparable to Sudan or Central Tanzania. Despite this richness, it has been poorly covered in both linguistic and anthropological research. Many languages are known to linguists and other scholars by only from a few hundred words in addition to records of the ethnography occurring only as scattered observations in colonial records. Recent political instability has made research in some areas impractical for outsiders, but the last decade has seen a significant growth in research coming from Nigerian scholars. A new generation, with computer skills and linguistic training, is beginning to make inroads into massive lacunae in the research agenda.

Nigeria has a few well-known archaeological sites, such as Igbo-Ukwu and Nok, but lacks systematic coverage, and many regions have no archaeological horizons. We have no idea of the age of human settlement in these regions. Scattered surface finds of Palaeolithic materials can lead us to suppose that early modern humans ranged across this area, but this is guesswork. The pattern of languages also seems to imply early migration and fragmentation of language phyla. Blench (2012) put together a map of language patterning and suggested a broad sweep of movement in chronological layers for the country as a whole. However, individual areas remain open for interpretation.

In the 1990s, researchers within the framework of the interdisciplinary research project "Cultural Development and Language History in the Environment of the West African Savannah" (SFB 268),[3] established between the Universities of Frankfurt (Germany), Maiduguri (Nigeria) and Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), spent a considerable amount of time in the Muri Mountains and adjacent regions of the Benue Valley. This paper synthesises unpublished research to build a picture of the peopling of the Muri Mountains in Northeastern Nigeria. It should be read in conjunction with a series of papers on individual groups in the area prepared by Jörg Adelberger (2024) and available at Mandaras.info. Hundreds of oral traditions on migrations and origins were collected, with the help of local assistants, during field research between 1990 and 1993, among all groups living in the Muri Mountains proper (along the northern ridge: the Cham, Dadiya, Bangwinji, Burak, Kushi, Pero; along the southern ridge: the Tsobo, Kwa, Bambuka, Gomu, Loo, Munga Leelau, Lemak, Kode; in the western hills: the Kwonci, Piya, Kulung, Nyam). This body of data is supplemented by the published literature and archival sources, mainly reports produced by British colonial officers, now housed at the National Archives, Kaduna (Nigeria). Traditions of origin of ethno-linguistic groups in the surrounding area are also presented. More often than not these traditions deal summarily with the groups as a whole and do not specify sub-units or clans. They were not collected during the period of field research but were extracted from published or archival sources.

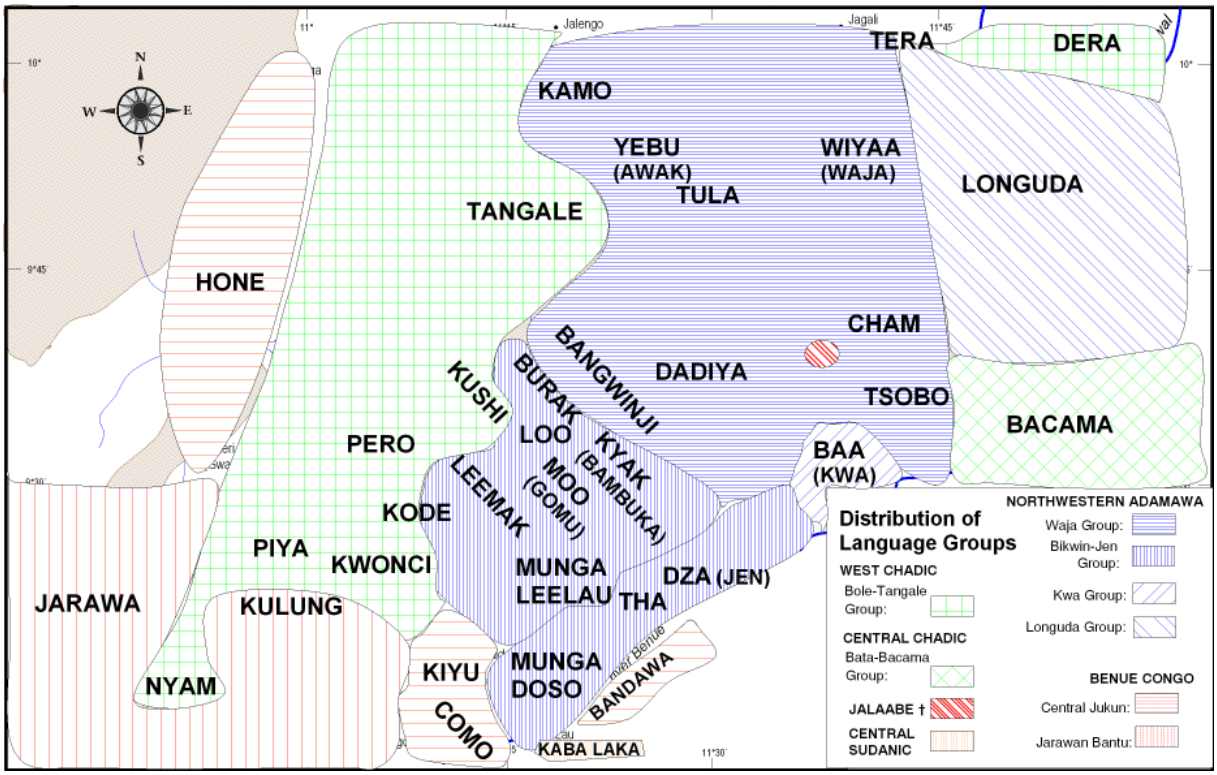
2. Background

The Muri Mountains are a chain of sandstone mountains running from west to east on the northern banks of the upper Benue valley. Their highest peaks reach about 1,100m and in their central parts they consist of two parallel mountain chains with a trough between them. On their eastern margin they merge into the Longuda plateau, and on the west into the Bauchi plateau. The mountains are home to a variety of small ethnic groups whose languages represent different phyla, comparable to the Mandara mountains or the Atakora chain in Togo. Different language families converge here: Chadic, Northwestern Adamawa and Jarawan Bantu. The area is a frontier region in various respects: nowadays the borders of the federal states of Gombe, Bauchi, Adamawa and Taraba cut through the area, but in the 19th century the area bordered several

[3] For a comprehensive presentation of the project see Albert, Löhr & Neumann 2004.

centralised polities and the inhabitants were exposed to raids by the Fulani Emirates of Gombe, Bauchi, Muri and Adamawa.

Located along the western and north-western parts of the Muri mountains, are the ethnic groups speaking Chadic languages (i.e. Pero, Piya, Kwonci, Kushi, Kode and Nyam), belonging to the Bole-Tangale group of Western Chadic. Southeast of the mountains towards the confluence of the rivers Gongola and Benue live the Bacama who speak a Central Chadic language. The eastern and southern parts of the mountains are inhabited by groups belonging to three separate sub-groups of Northwestern Adamawa (Waja, Bikwin-Jen and Baa) and in the south-west live the Kulung, who speak a Jarawan Bantu language. Other Jarawan groups live on the western fringes of the mountains (Adelberger & Kleinewillinghöfer 1992:47; Crozier & Blench 1992). Jukunoid speaking groups live both to the northwest as well as to the south. Perhaps more surprisingly, there is also a Central Sudanic language spoken in a small community in Lau (Idiatov & Van de Velde 2020). Finally, the Jalaabe people, whose language is virtually extinct, live among the Cham. Their language, Jalaa, has so far defied classification and is plausibly one of Africa's five language isolates (Blench 2018). Map 1 shows the location of the main groups mentioned here and their linguistic affiliation.



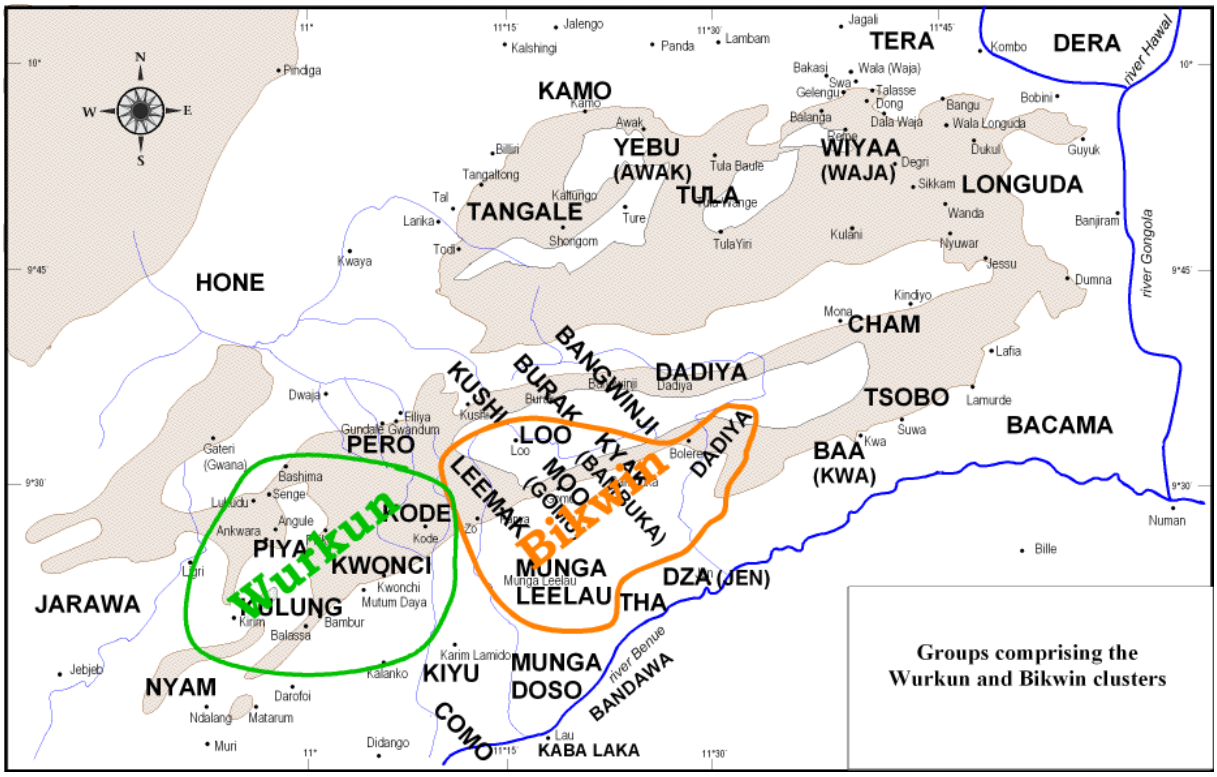
Map 1. Languages of the Muri Mountains Area[4]

However, it should be kept in mind that on the ground there are no clear-cut language boundaries: historically, the practice of linguistic exogamy meant that multilingualism was the norm. As a consequence, many languages were restructured through contact. For example, Nyam, though a Chadic language, has lost many typical features of Bole-Tangale languages and taken on characteristics of the Adamawa languages (see §3.4.1.6 and Andreas 2012). Hausa is now the *lingua franca* here as in most of Northern Nigeria; but this is probably a recent development,

[4] All maps, with the exception of Map 14, are courtesy of the authors.

as in much of Central Nigeria, a consequence of the colonial administration's policies. Settlements, particularly larger ones, are inhabited by people of diverse origins and commonly the people are multilingual.[5]

Besides the groupings based on linguistic classifications there are two emic groupings based on supra-ethnic self-identification: Wurkun in the western parts of the mountains, minimally consisting of Kulung, Piya, Kwonci and Kode but often including a wider set of peoples; and Bikwin in the southern mountain range, consisting of Leemak, Munga Leelau, Gomu, Bambuka, Loo and the Tunga section of the Dadiya. These are indicated by the coloured lines on Map 2.



Map 2. Supra-ethnic clusters of the Muri Mountains

Wurkun is derived from the Jukun language meaning 'people of the hills' and, while it was originally an external name, became accepted by the groups concerned. Their common identity as Wurkun is based on shared cultural features and a history of effective interaction.[6] The Pero, Piya, Kode and Kwonci use the autonym *ampandi* (=people of the mountain) to indicate both their origin from a common area around Mount Andeng to the south of Filiya and to acknowledge the close linguistic relationship they have.

Bikwin, a recent cultural invention, means 'we are one', but compared to the Wurkun cluster, the coherence between the Bikwin groups is less pronounced and individuals will first identify themselves with their respective ethnic groups before also considering being part of Bikwin. With the exception of the Tunga-Dadiya, all groups are linguistically very closely related and their languages are classified as a sub-group within the Northwestern Adamawa languages of Niger-Congo phylum. The Tunga-Dadiya, an offshoot of the more northern Dadiya, identify themselves as part of Bikwin due to geographical proximity and interactions with their Bikwin neighbours. The overarching meaning of the term Bikwin rests on the basis of close linguistic relationship, a shared environment, common interactions and cultural similarities. Although Burak belongs to the Bikwin languages, the Burak people do not consider themselves as part of

[5] For the topic of multilingualism in an African context, see, inter alia, Lüpke & Storch 2013.
[6] See Adelberger 1992 for the meaning and history of the term 'Wurkun'.

it, most probably as the result of their separation and migration to the northern part of the mountains, putting them geographically apart. Among the Wurkun, with the addition of Pero, a high number of kinship units or clans bearing the same—or very similar—name is found among its members. This also holds true for the groups belonging to the Bikwin cluster, demonstrating that these supra-ethnic clusters are based on a history of social interaction and cultural exchange. Table 1 shows the languages mentioned here with their affiliations.

Phylum	Subgroup	Branch	Members
Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Jalaa
Afroasiatic	Chadic	West	Tangale, Pero, Piya, Kwonci, Kushi, Kode, Nyam
	Chadic	Central	Dera, Tera, Bacama
Niger-Congo	Adamawa	Waja	Kamo, Tula, Awak, Waja, Dadiya, Bangwinji, Cham, Tsobo
	Adamawa	Longuda	Longuda
	Adamawa	Bikwin-Jen	Leemak, Munga Leelau, Gomu, Bambuka, Loo, Burak, Bambuka, Jen, Tha
	Adamawa	Isolate	Baa
	Benue-Congo	Jarawan Bantu	Kulung
	Jukunoid	North	Hone, Kiyu
Nilo-Saharan	Central Sudanic	SBB	Lau Laka

Table 1. Language families and subgroups around the Muri Mountains

Each of the ethnic groups has its own history of migrations reflected in the traditions of origin of their constituent sub-units, descent-based clans and lineages or territorially based sections. The current composition of the populations of the Muri Mountains and the spatial distribution of ethno-linguistic groups is the outcome of complex processes of superimposition, expulsion, assimilation or segmentation. The dynamic behind the population history exemplifies processes of the African Frontier model put forward by Kopytoff (1987), expounding the reproduction and evolution of societies by processes generated on the fringes of metropoles (or political centres). Since "… history has emerged to be one of ceaseless flux among populations" (Kopytoff 1987:7), a status as first-comer or late-comer was significant for the role and political prestige accrued by social actors in a society.[7]

All the groups under discussion were mountain dwellers who lived in villages on ridges or terraced hill-sides until the beginning of the 20th century when the British colonial administration initiated the downhill movement of settlements.[8] In reality, it is difficult to know what originally drove these peoples into this montane area, as subsistence is definitely more stressful than on the plains. The traditions of origin reported in this paper are almost certainly too shallow to be a viable explanation. Indeed, some of them, such as migration from Sokoto or Borno are certainly twentieth century fabrications. These populations were most likely originally plains-dwellers who moved into the hills as a consequence of the insecurity of slaving; this is certainly the case elsewhere in the Middle Belt. Droughts and famine are another probable cause, together with conflict. A similar issue has been debated for the Mandara Mountains in Northern Cameroon; despite its ethnic diversity today, it seems to have long been avoided by settled

[7] See Harnischfeger, Leger & Storch 2014 for an interpretation of the African Frontier Model in a Northern Nigerian context.

[8] For a more detailed study of the settlement history and movements of the three ethnic groups Bangwinji, Burak and Kushi in the northern Muri Mountains, see Adelberger, Brunk & Kleine-willinghöfer 1993.

farming populations (see the summary of the debate in Sterner 2003). Tambo (1978) explored the archival resources for the Jos Plateau, arguing against the static models of conservative societies put forward by earlier observers. The model is thus one of original linguistic affiliation restructuring both language itself but also social structure and traditions to generate the mosaic observed synchronically.

The hypothesis of this paper is that in the Muri Mountains there was an earlier population substrate which was absorbed into the current ethnic mosaic by immigrating groups. The only surviving remnant of this substrate is represented by the Jalaabe sub-section of the Cham. Jalaa is a language isolate and thus a likely descendant of the languages spoken in the Muri Mountains prior to the immigration of other populations, rather like Basque is a survivor of the languages in Europe prior to the coming of the Indo-Europeans. The general model is rather like proposed for the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, that the region gradually accumulated layers of population, with different linguistic affiliations (see Thelwall & Schadeberg 1983). We have chosen to present the various ethno-linguistic groups ordered by their linguistic classification, as these more often than not coincide with their geographical distribution, as can be seen on the language map. Unfortunately, a lack of archaeology in this region means that first settlement cannot be dated, but to judge by comparison with other regions of Central Nigeria, there would certainly have been low-density Palaeolithic foragers preceding the identifiable ethnolinguistic groups found there today (Blench 2010, 2012).

The paper surveys the traditions of origin of the numerous clans and descent units making up the various ethno-linguistic groups in the Muri Mountains. The aim is to show the dynamic history of the population and to explore the traces in the collective memory of the population groups. Our working hypothesis regarding traditions of origin is that an asserted terrestrial origin expresses, in mythical terms, a first-comer or autochthonous status of the population unit in question.

3. Migration histories by language family and ethnic group

3.1. Isolate

Africa has five language isolates, Jalaa, Bangi Me, Laal, Hadza and Chabu (Blench 2018, 2022). Given that Africa represents the origin of modern humans, this is a surprisingly low number. The New World, for example, has seventy-six isolates. This suggests that there has been a long process of assimilation which has overwritten a far higher level of phylic diversity. One of these, Jalaa, is found in the Muri Mountains. Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer (2001, n.d.) recorded a nearly extinct language spoken by only a handful of old people among the Cham. Jalaa is a language isolate, the sole survivor of an otherwise extinct phylum (Blench 2018). Lexical traces of Jalaa can be detected among several languages spoken mainly in the eastern and southern parts of the Muri Mountains (Cham, Dadiya, Tso [cf. Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.]). In oral traditions, the Jalaa are associated with an origin in the earth, expressing in mythical terms an autochthonous status. The Jalaabe [cet][9] formerly occupied a much larger area in the uplands of the eastern Muri Mountains. Their former settlement area, called Jiiwodu, consisted of a number of hamlets. Especially the present Böge clan claims to have first lived at Baalabe slightly further to the south of their present area. Baalabe is said to be identical with Kwa Dutse and may be the same settlement as Yibong referred to by the Kwa (see below). Among the Jalaabe, Kleinewillinghöfer (2001) was able to document the remains of a language that cannot be classified into any of the existing language phyla and exemplifies one of the few language isolates discovered in Africa (see Blench 2018). The Jalaa language represents an old linguistic substratum of the autochthonous population.

In their own traditions, the Jalaabe say that their ancestors emerged from the ground from a tunnel with water situated in one of their old settlements (Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.:2). Still today

[9] Three-letter ISO codes are marked on each ethnic group in square brackets.

they are considered as custodians and owners of the ground and they maintain several ritual sites (Jisimah n.d.:15). Among the neighbouring Dadiya and the Burak further west, population elements trace their ancestry to an autochthonous group called Jaabe, who are closely related to or even identical with the Jalaabe, without, however, retaining any linguistic traces as is the case among the Cham.

3.2. Adamawa

3.2.1. Isolate: Baa [=Kwa]

The Baa or Kwa [kwb] are a small group living to the west of the Tsobo and consist of several clans. One person is raBáà, the people Báà and the language nyaa Báà. According to Ethnologue (2025) they may number about 7,000. The core group of clans migrated to their present territory from Yibong, a site in the mountain range to the north which is most probably also the place of origin of the autochthonous Jalaa mentioned above. The majority of the clans of the Kwa, before settling at Yibong, claim to have originally come from Sokoto area which they left to evade conversion to Islam.[10] One of their clans (the Kwë clan) is Bacama in origin, another (the Gwita) is said to have settled first at Lamurde, a Bacama town, after having left Yibong. The British District Officer, Major Logan, stated in 1927 that the Kwa were an offshoot of the Bacama.[11] The Bacama have a dominant presence at the south-eastern edge of the Muri Mountains since well before the 19th century (Stevens 1973:483, note 12). A documentation project on the Baa has been conducted by Mirjam Möller Nwadigo from 2016 onwards.[12]

Culturally and historically, the Kwa show many parallels with the Bacama: for instance the putative origin from Sokoto or Gobir (Meek 1931a, Vol. 1:2) and the migration from Gobir to Demsa (Stevens 1973:71f), as well as the descent system which Stevens (1973:86) classifies as a double descent system with patrilineal emphasis; but linguistically the Baa have peculiarities which make them unique (see Möller Nwadigo & Lesage 2023).

A sub-unit (the Bugei) of the Gwita clan is from Jen. The Kaso clan are said to be the original inhabitants of Kwa. From the fact that the Kagba clan claims an origin from a lake one may deduce that they are also autochthonous to their present settlement area. An autochthonous status is also probable for the Nakyurin lineage of the Deyi clan, because it has control over the fertile areas with loamy soil.

3.2.2. Waja subgroup

3.2.2.1. Cham

The Cham [cfa] live at the north-eastern margin of the Muri Mountains. According to the 1963 census they number about 15,000 people, a more recent number given by Ethnologue (2025) is 25,000. They are subdivided into three sections: Mona (or Bwilim), Kindiyo (or Dijim) and Looja (Jaabe or Jalaabe, also called Centum by the Kindiyo) (see also CAPRO 1995:102-103). Mona and Kindiyo are territorial groupings and the various clans of the Cham are distributed across these sections. The main body of the Cham which later separated into Kindiyo and Mona is said to come originally from Jingum, a site in the valley of the river Gongola near the town of Shani. They say that they left Jingum because of poor yields and over-population and migrated via Nyuwar to Fitilai (or Kuntur as it is called by the Waja) on the southern edge of the Longuda plateau. At the end of the 19th century they were driven out from Fitilai by invading Waja and settled in the Muri Mountains (NAK SNP 17-9150, Walker 1929), separating into Mona and Kindiyo. Map 3 shows the migrations of the Cham clans to their present location.

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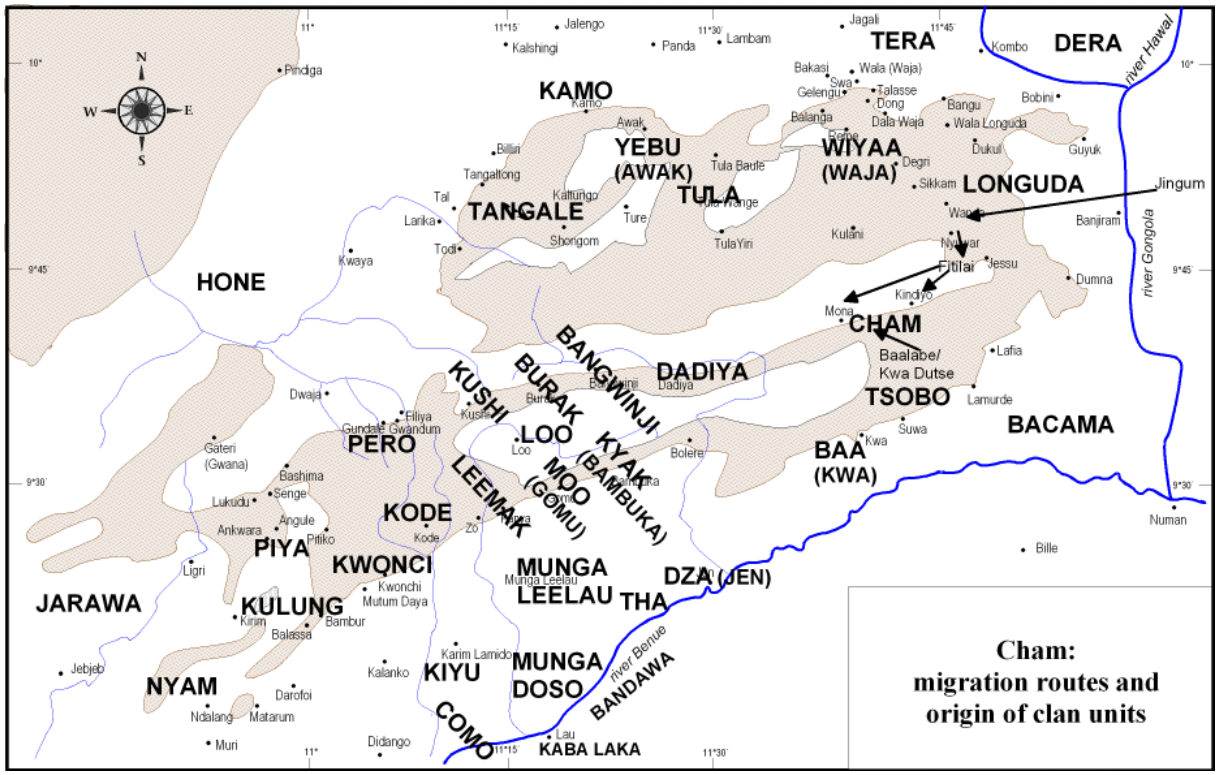
[10] See also Brackenbury (NAK SNP 10–374P/1917), who reports that they came from Gobir to Demsa (which is in the Batta area) and then onto their present location.

[11] NAK SNP 17-99 Kwa Tribe-Ethnology (1927) by Major Logan.

[12] The files can be found at https://www.elararchive.org/uncategorized/SO_bdf5b36f-8170-4c04-a5c9-d8273864401b (06.01.2026).

A slightly different version is given by the author of the book *Cham – the seat of Chugoteh* (Jisimah n.d.:12-15) who relates that starting from Yemen, the Cham migrated via Ngazargamu, Kukawa and Dikwa to Shani and Wanda, then to Dukul where there occurred a quarrel with the Waja in 1883 and therefore the Cham moved further to Fitilai where they divided into Dijim/Kindiyo (upper Fitilai) and Bwilim/Mona (lower Fitilai). In the Muri Mountains they came across the Jalaabe already settling at Looja. The clans Tiksir and Kwasir are also mentioned as being autochthonous to the area (Jisimah n.d.:15-16).



Map 3. Cham migrations

3.2.2.2. Dadiya

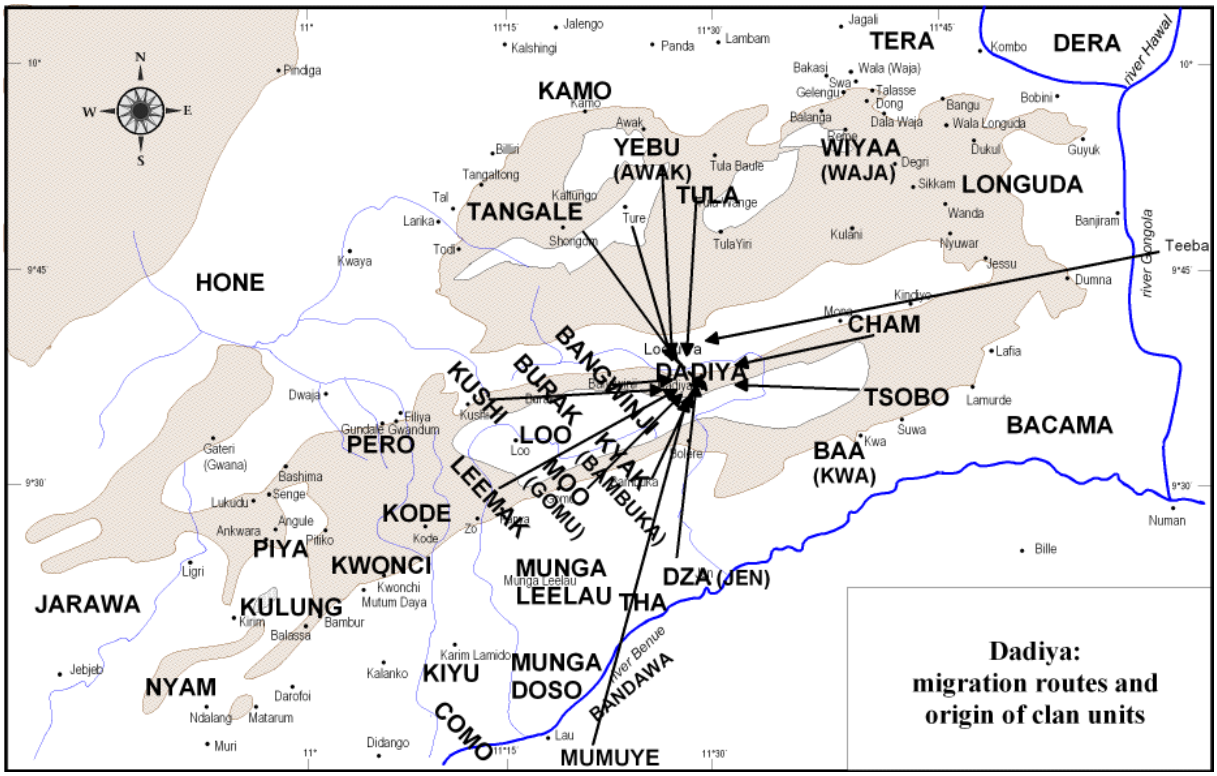
The Dadiya [dbd] occupy the northern range of the Muri Mountains between the Cham to the east and the Bangwinji to the west. The river Bolere cutting through the northern mountain range served as a pathway for expansion to the south, thus there are also Dadiya (these are called Loofa, Bolere or Tunga Dadiya) settling in the southern mountain range. According to an estimation based on numbers from the Bauchi State Development Levy of the early 1990s, the Dadiya may number about 24,000 people, CAPRO (1995:250) give 50,000 and according to Ethnologue (2025) they are 70,000.

The Dadiya claim to have originally come from Yemel/Yemen before settling at Teeba, a site in the Gongola valley east of Shellen. Sixty years ago, the same tradition was recorded (NAK Mathews 1934:33). Because of conflicts with neighbouring groups — the Lala, Longuda, Babur are mentioned, as well as the Bacama — they left Teeba and migrated to Loolua (or Dogon Dutse in Hausa), an isolated hill a few kilometres to the north of the Muri Mountains (see also CAPRO 1995:250-251). According to information collected by Government Anthropologist Mathews (NAK Mathews 1934:33), the Dadiya left this site due to pressure from the Tula Wange. The reasons related to us during the research were lack of water and farm land[13] which made the Dadiya leave and move to their present site in the Muri Mountains. Here they came

[13] Another reason may have been the exposed position of the hill, offering no possibilities of retreat in case of attacks by Fulani emirate raiders.

across people already living there called Jaabe. The exodus from Loolua must have taken place before the 19th century, because in British colonial times some Dadiya returned there.

The present Dadiya consist of numerous clans, many of which are again subdivided into named lineages. The Jaabe were integrated into different clans and today there are several clans and lineages tracing their descent to these autochthonous people: most prominent are the Lobwaja, but there are also others such as Lotani, the lineages Bwareb, Lokulum and Logulo of the Loobwere clan and a host of others who are considered to have emerged from a cave or a stream in the Dadiya mountains. The association with the earth articulated in these traditions reflects their status as autochthones and original owners of the land. It seems, however, that the memory of their original language is lost among the descendants of the Jaabe, for Kleinewillinghöfer could not locate anyone who was able to remember even residues of their language. This is most probably a result of the higher degree of their assimilation into the social organisation of the Dadiya compared with the Cham where they remained a distinct if not marginalised group known as the Jalaabe. Integration and assimilation are characteristic features of Dadiya clans, for there are many clans or lineages who came from surrounding ethnic groups such as the Tula, Ture, Awak, Kaltungo, Cham/Mona, Bangwinji, Kushi, Tsobo, Bambuka, Jen, Gomu, Leemak of Panya and even the distant Mumuye. Map 4 shows the multiple origins of Dadiya clans.

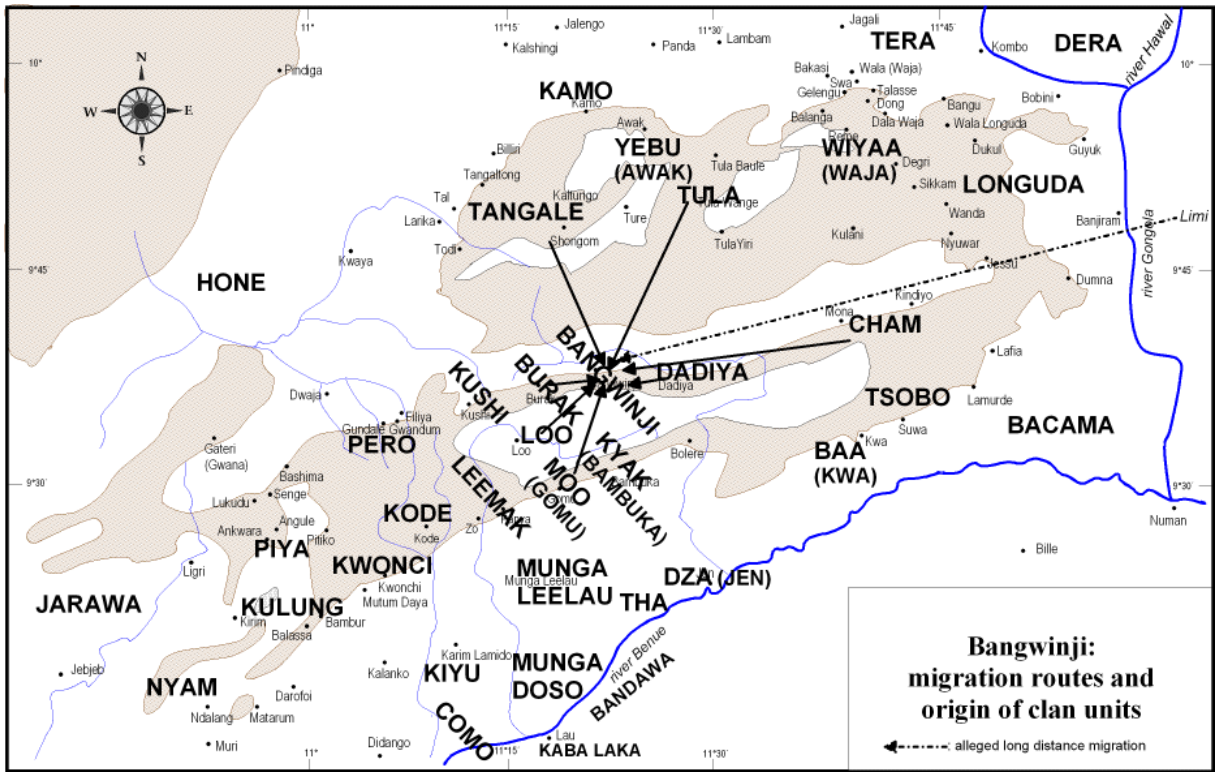


Map 4. Dadiya migrations

Only very few loans from Jalaa entered the Dadiya language. But there are some idiosyncratic features of Dadiya, for instance the complete loss of the noun class system, which may perhaps have been induced by the shifting of the western Jaabe to Dadiya language within a relatively short period of time (Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.:5). However, loss of noun-classes in Adamawa is common; a similar process has taken place in Yebu, Kamo and Baa.

3.2.2.3. Bangwinji

To the west of the Dadiya live the Bangwinji [bsj], numbering about 7,500 people according to the 1991 census.[14] They are subdivided into two regional sections Naabang in the east and Kaalo in the west, both of which consist of various clans and lineages. Several of the clans claim to have come from a mythical place called Limi in the east. On their arrival in the Muri Mountains they are said to have met a people called the Nobneb who subsequently left the area and moved to the south. The Nobneb were said to have been owners of dwarf cattle, *muturu*, and remnants of their dwellings are still visible on Mount Binaamwe. One clan (the Kulab-Bishuuleb) is said to have come from a cave in the east, probably in the present Cham area, another (the Bishomeba-Lashongeb) is purportedly also from a cave or valley and a third clan (the Naafuwab-Booken) is said to have emerged from a stream: they may thus represent descendants of an autochthonous element of the population, as we have seen in the case of the Dadiya – but without mention of a name like Jaa or Jalaabe. There are other clans which came from neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Dadiya, Cham, Tula, Tangale, Gomu, Loo or Burak. Government Anthropologist Mathews (NAK Bau Prof 231F 1934:39) mentions that the 'ancestor' of the Bangwinji was from Tula Wange, suggesting that he was the first to arrive. This, however, could not be confirmed by a comprehensive study of the clan traditions.



Map 5. Bangwinji migrations

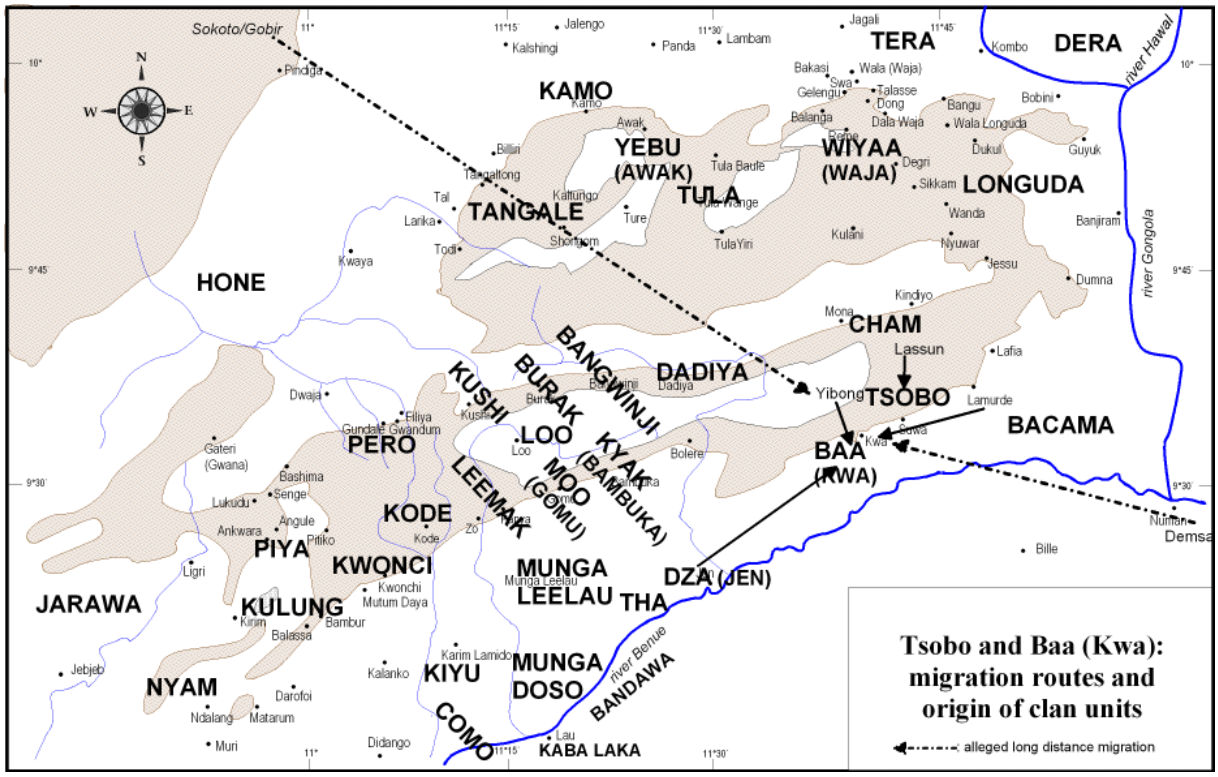
Methodologically, when studying the history and origins of an ethnic group, it is crucial to pay attention to the constituent sub-units or clans and not to regard the ethnic group as a monolithic unit. Otherwise, it can lead to the flawed approach of taking the tradition of a single clan as representative of the origin of the entire ethnic group.

3.2.2.4. Tsobo

The Tsobo [ldp] or Pire, as they are called by their neighbours, live in the southeastern Muri Mountains and may number about 9,000 people, according to Ethnologue (2025) 6,000. They

[14] 8,000 according to CAPRO (1995:56).

are subdivided into four sections: the Berbu occupying the northern parts of their settlement territory, the Suwabo living in the western parts, the Kwaazin, which is only a small group living just to the north of the Suwabo, and the Gusubo in the eastern region. Before they subdivided into these regional divisions they had lived together on the Bang plateau at a site called Lassun. The Tsobo seem to have kept to themselves because their clans have no traditions of origin from other groups or places except the various settlements abandoned during their movements from Lassun/Bang. From a comment by Stevens (1973:74, 276, 483-484, also 1976:31) on the migrations of the Bacama it may be deduced that the Tsobo were already settling in the area prior to their arrival. He considers this to have taken place well before the Fulani exercised pressure on them at the beginning of the 19th century. Their neighbours to the north are the Cham, and if the Tsobo were pushed out from Bang by the invading Cham, then this took place at the end of the 19th century.



Map 6. Tsobo and Baa migrations

The Tsobo seem to be the first of the Tula-Waja language groups to have arrived in the Muri Mountains, and their language exhibits a number of loan words from Jalaa suggesting a history of close contact between the Tsobo and the Jalaabe that began much earlier than the contact between the Jalaabe and the Cham or Dadiya. One may even hypothesise a contact between Tso and another Jalaa-related language which has vanished, judging from some phonological peculiarities in the dialects of Tso (Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.:4-6).

3.2.2.5. Tula

The Tula [tul] number about 30,000 people (Ethnologue 2025) and are subdivided into three sections: the Tula Wange (Kutule), the Tula Yiri (Yirbu) and the Tula Baule (Baule).[15] Four clans of the Tula Wange are said to have come from Bornu, and the Tula Yiri also came from Bornu but stayed first at Kata/Shellen. Two of their clans, on arrival in their present area, received fire, seed corn and corn rites from the Tula Wange. The Fura clan of the Tula Yiri has

[15] Kleinewillinghöfer (2006) has also published on Tula.

emigrated to Dadiya at Banduwa (NAK Bau Prof 231 F, 1934:27-32). There are indications that some of the Tula Wange and Tula Yiri came from the south near the river Benue, and it is worth quoting from a colonial report written in 1908:

> Serikin [sic] Labuta (Elephant) informed me that, in the childhood of his grandfather [approximately mid-nineteenth century] the tribe lived to the South in a district called Tuar near the Benue River and close to a Filane colony, this was probably Yola. They were constantly raided and bullied by the Filane, and so eventually decided to push northward. On reaching their present site they found it occupied by some 300 emigrants from Bellaku, a Muri town. They fought the Bellaku people killing some, but allowing the remainder to settle near them and founded the two towns of Wange and Iri in the further valley. The few remaining Bellaku people now form a small Ungwa in Wange. Tula Boule have nothing to do with Wange, but are originally Tangale … (NAK SNP7-1212/1909).

The British colonial officer Carlyle also suggests that the Tula Baule were a section of the Tangale people who camped for a while at Kaltungo in the exodus caused by the arrival of the Jukun in the area, and then moved on to Tula where they arrived simultaneously with the Tula Wange. He assumes the Tula Wange to have the same origin as the Waja. The aboriginal people on the Tula hills were absorbed but their language survived. Remnants of these earlier people lived in the Belaku quarter at Tula Wange (SNP 7-968/1912 T. F. Carlyle, 1912).

3.2.2.6. Kamo

The northern neighbours of the Tangale are the Kamo [kcq] who may number about 20,000 people. They claim to have come from Yemen together with the ancestors of the Tera, moving via the Mandara hills and Deba to that area where now the settlement of Panda is located. While some of them stayed here, others went up Kamo hill to settle there (NAK Bau Prof 231 F, 1934:24; CAPRO 1995:215-216). According to information gathered in the early 20th century, a group of Jukun from Gwana settled at Kamo, intermingling with the original inhabitants and gaining a dominant position, but at the same time adopting their language (NAK SNP 7 – 1212/1909, SNP 7 – 968/1912).

3.2.2.7. Yebu [=Awak]

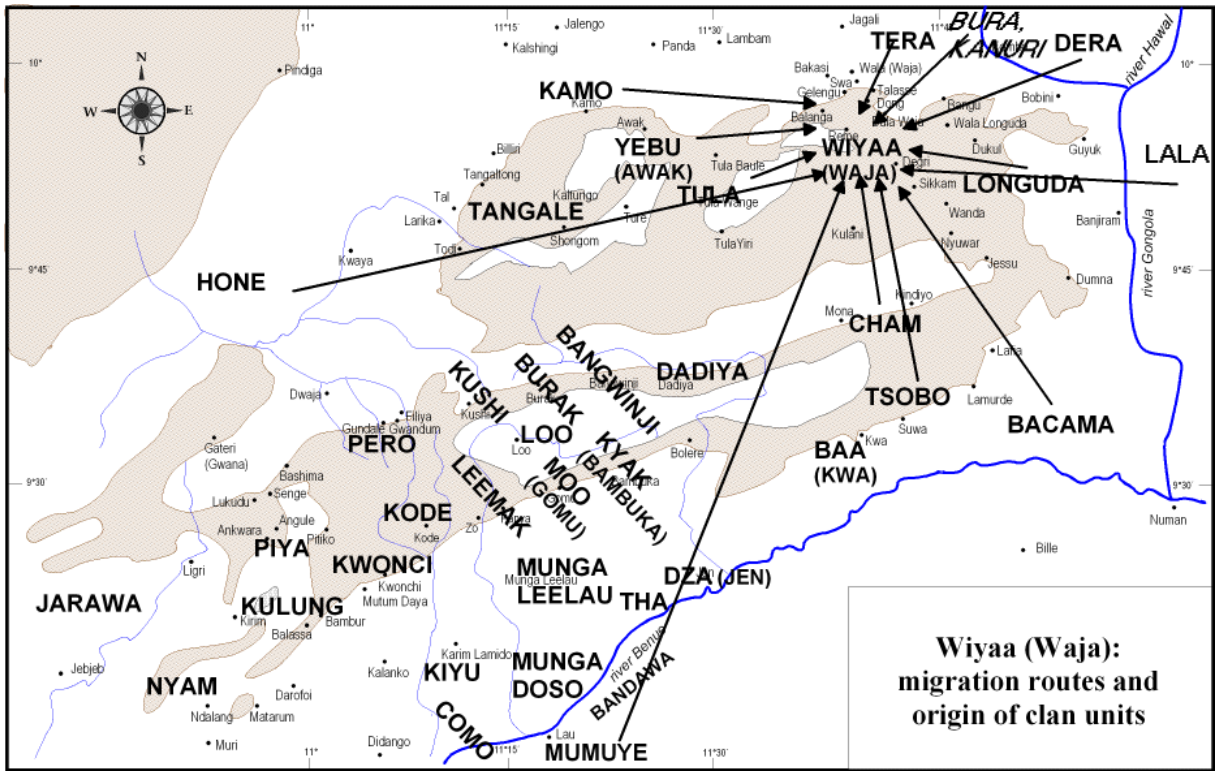
To the southeast of the Kamo live the Yebu [awo] (= Awak/Yibu), a small group of about 6,000 people. The Awak claim to have migrated from Yemen via Bornu to Bima hill and thence to Awak hill. There is a tradition that a man called Anunu and a woman called Kelifide emerged from a hole at the foot of Awak hill, having travelled from the east underground, and built a house. People of Tera origin from Deba Habe camped at the foot of the hill and Anunu gave them fire. Subsequently, they settled here and intermarried with the Tondon clan of the Awak (NAK Bau Prof 231 F,1934:25-26; CAPRO 1995:35).[16]

In a colonial report from 1908, it is related that the Awak came from the Benue, like the Tula, and, on reaching Awak hill, met a people called the Tidi, whom they fought and killed (NAK SNP 7 – 1212/1909). Assistant Resident Carlyle (SNP 7 – 968/1912) is of the opinion that the Awak were probably an offshoot of the Tangale from Kakali town, once lying between Kamo and Awak, and taking over the language of the original inhabitants. As disparate as these accounts may be, they do provide evidence that the Yebu people are made up of sub-groups with a variety of origins.

[16] For more information on the Yebu, especially their language, see Blench 2020, 2021a.

3.2.2.8. Wiyaa [=Waja]

The Waja [wja] are subdivided into the localised sections the Wu (or Plains) Waja (Wajan Kasa) and the Deri (or Hill) Waja (Wajan Dutse) and count about 80,000 people. Kleinewillinghöfer (1991) has published on the language and culture of the Wiyaa; in a recent article (Kleine-willinghöfer 2014) he presents a detailed overview of all the clans of the Waja and their origins, based on a local historical manuscript. There are a number of clans which may be considered to be autochthonous: the Bacaraa, Joro, Guwaa, Bajundomba, Bakakalaa and Gukaa claim to have come from the ground, the Naadiya from a cave and the Banyamba and Bakaŋgaluwa from a river. These clans are all among the Plains Waja. There is a clan among the Hill Waja called Jalaa which seems to have a relationship with the Jalaa ethno-linguistic group mentioned above. All other clans are said to be from more or less neighbouring ethnic groups such as the Awak, Kamo, Tula, Cham, Dera, Gasi, Longuda, Bena, Jara, Tera, Jukun of Pindiga and Panda, or more distant groups such as the Bura, Kanuri, Mumuye, Tsobo or the Bacama.



Map 7. Wiyaa migrations

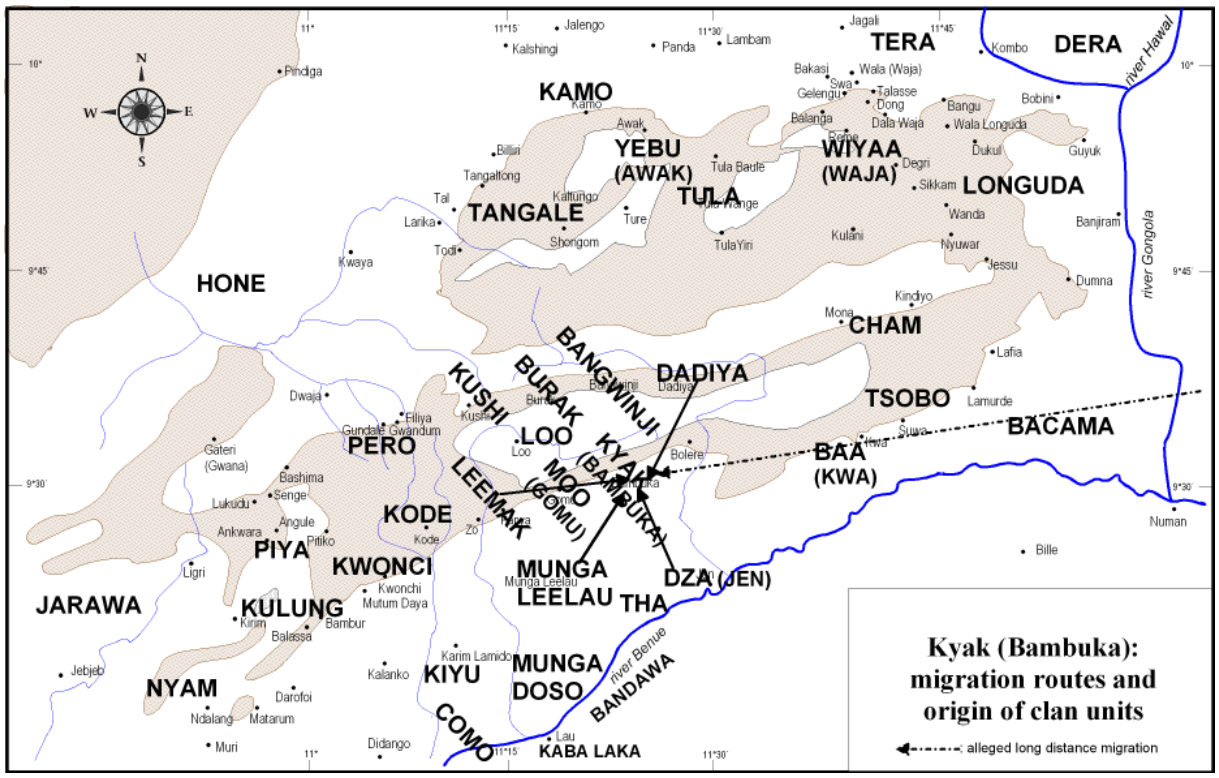
3.2.3. Bikwin-Jen

3.2.3.1. Kyak [=Bambuka]

The Kyak [bka] (or Bambuka) belong to the Bikwin cluster. They may number about 5,000 people subdivided into various clans and lineages, three of these clans are said to have originated from a cave: the Wuusoo/Nwasok, the Ya Kwen and the Ya Weiswei. These may be considered to represent descendants of the autochthonous population. A fourth clan, Ya Ngwakömfu, in some traditions is also associated with a cave named Biyang Korok situated at the northern side of Bambuka mountain, but in some other traditions the clan is said to have just come from the east. The Nwasok clan has to be the first to sow guinea corn in the agricultural annual cycle before anyone else is allowed to do so, this may be interpreted as evidence for an acknowledgement of their special relationship with the soil expressed in ritual terms.

Some clans plainly claim to have come from the east, sometimes citing Mecca or Medina, and having taken different routes either along a northern path or along the foot of the southern Muri Mountains. A third category of clans came from other ethnic groups such as the Dadiya,

Munga Leelau, Jen, Leemak of Panya or even the Hausa.[17] Map 8 shows the recorded migrations of the Kyak clans.



Map 8. Kyak migrations

3.2.3.2. Moo [=Gomu]

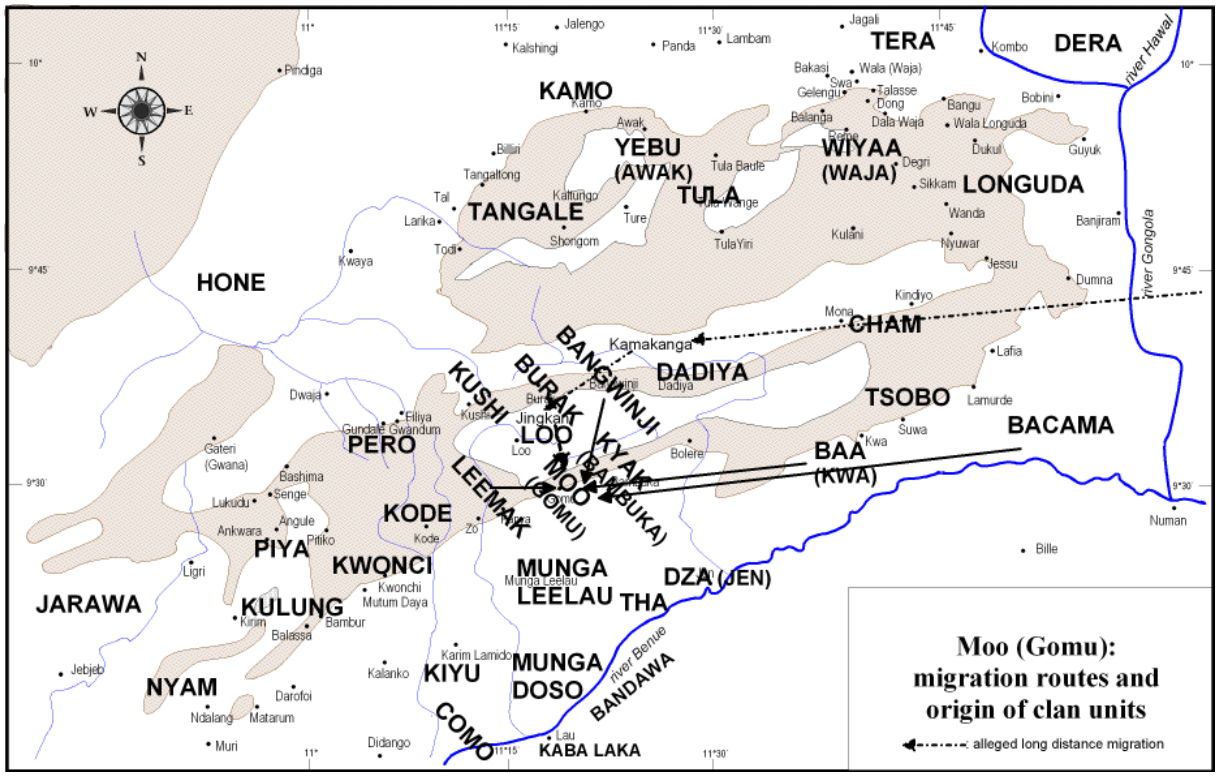
The western neighbours of the Bambuka are the Moo [gwg] (Gomu), numbering about 5,000 people. They are subdivided into two regional sections: the Nwatal in the western part of their territory and the Gongwee in the eastern part. In each section, several clans exist. It is stated of the Gwanzal clan that they came from the east, having first settled at Kamakanga, a site near Maitungu in Bambam area, before moving on to Jingkan in the Muri Mountains where they found the Loo clan Byene (the Loo themselves state that the Byene are from Kushi). About half of the clans state they came from a cave, or descended from heaven while others came from other ethnic groups such as the Bangwinji, Kwa or the Leemak of Zoo. The ancestor of the Zok clan is said to have stepped down from heaven, leaving his footprints together with those of his dog on the rock of Loodim Mountain. The Zok are considered as traditional owners of the land and are associated with important rituals in the annual agricultural cycle, for instance, they perform a sacrifice before the first sowing may take place. The Bogok clan is attributed with having introduced to the Gomu the use of fire for cooking; different versions exist about their origin: they are either from heaven, or came out of a cave or out of a Baobab tree. It is remarkable that, in any case, they are never attributed to an external origin. The Dangse clan came from Dulum near Numan.

In a report[18] from 1912 by the British colonial officer Haughton it is suggested that the ancestors of the Gomu were from the Mumuye area. We could not record such a tradition among the Gomu, but among the neighbouring Leemak, the Guma clan has its origin from Mumuye. There was a considerable exchange and movement of clans between the Bikwin groups and

[17] Harley (2020) is working on the language of the Kyak.

[18] SNP 10 – 77P/1913, Muri Province, Lau Division, Gwomu District, Assessment Report by Haughton November 1912. The statement is repeated in Fremantle (1972:27).

especially between the Gomu and the Leemak, which in our view explains this statement by Haughton. This reference dating from the beginning of the 20th century, on the other hand, can give us a clue for dating the migration from Mumuye which must have taken place well into the 19th century at the latest. Map 9 indicates the sources of migration into Gomu.

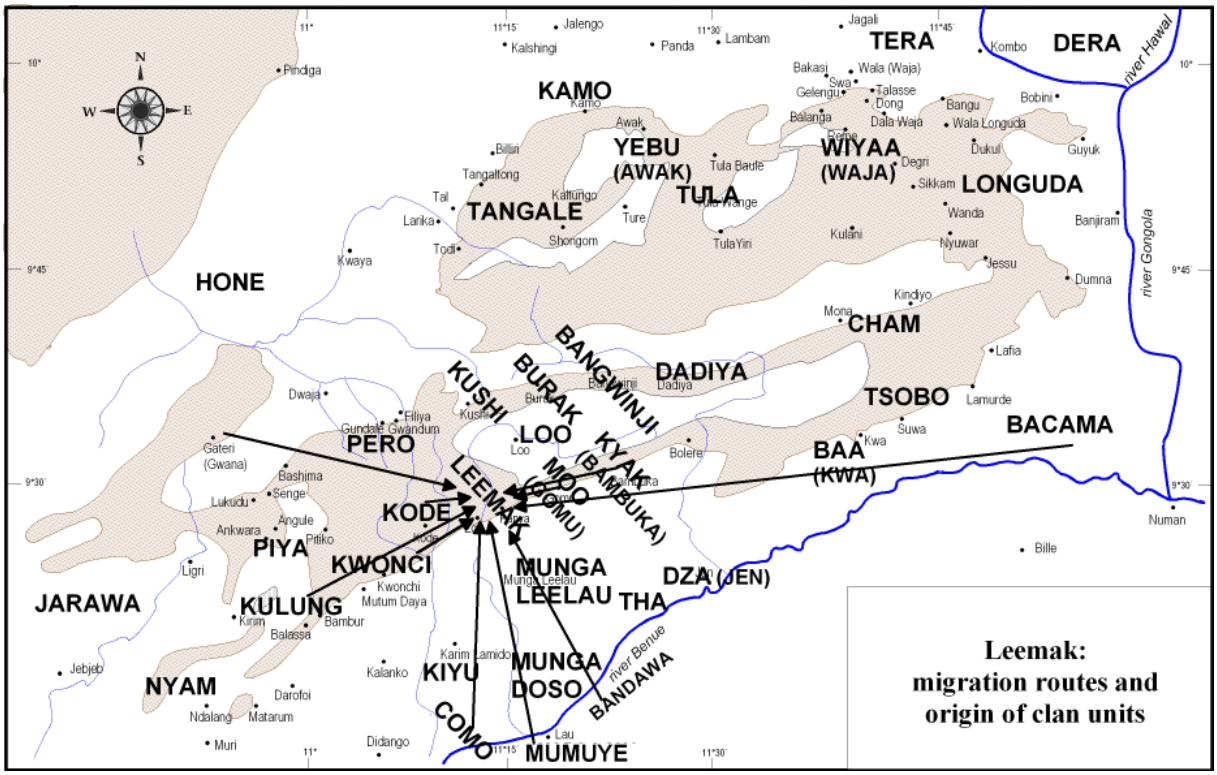


Map 9. Moo migrations

3.2.3.3. Leemak

To the west of Gomu live the Leemak or Mak [pbl], consisting of two main settlements, Zo and Panya. In each of these settlements various clans reside. Their total population figure is given as 5,690 by Ethnologue (2025). It is only at Zo where some clans say they are autochthonous: the Lee Safen (from Zo Makarau), the Bali and the Nwayang (from a cave northeast of Panya, they are credited with introducing guinea corn to the Leemak), the Lee Dönga (from a cave in Kode area), and the Lee Kadar/Bigiro (from a cave to the north of Zo Dutse, they are said to be the originators of the Mak language). The origin of the majority of clans is from other ethnic groups: the Bambuka, Jukun of Gwana, Mumuye, Gomu, Como, Kulung, Bandawa, Kode, or from the Bacama of Dulum near Numan (see also CAPRO 1992:57-58).[19] A part of the Zida clan which originated from Bacama is attributed with having introduced the use of fire. Many clans originated from Gomu, a fact that is corroborated by Gomu traditions. Map 10 shows the Leemak migration routes.

[19] An origin from Dulum was also reported by one of the Gomu clans.



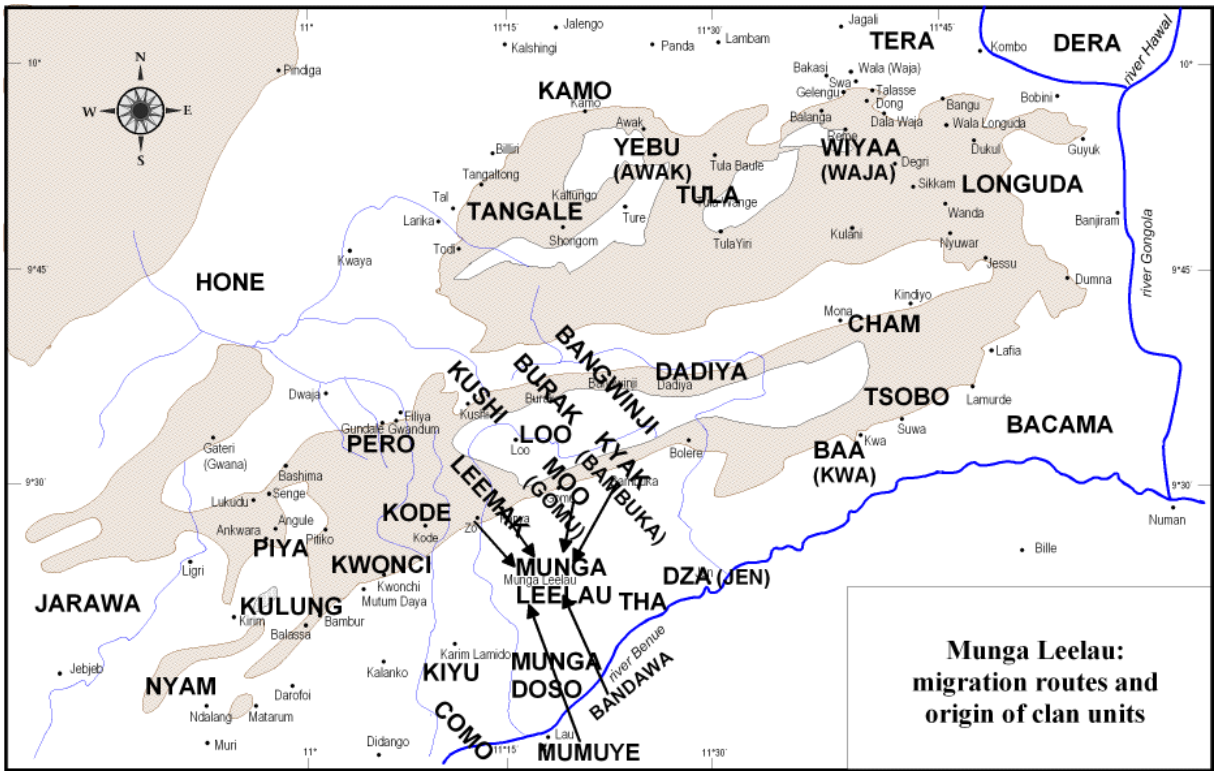
Map 10. Leemak migrations

3.2.3.4. Munga Leelau

The Munga Leelau [ldk] live to the southwest of the Leemak. They may number about 5,000 people and consist of several clans, but only one of them is autochthonous: the Brem came from a cave in Mount Panya. The Brem clan has responsibility for a rain cult which may be interpreted as a ritual acknowledgement of their connection with fertility and with the earth. The ancestor of the Tanyam clan is said to have descended from heaven and his footprints and those of his horse are left on a rock of Mount Panya (see also CAPRO 1992:57). Map 11 shows the migrations of the clans which make up the present-day Munga Leelau.

The Wop sub-clan, which is either from the Gomu or the Leemak of Zo, is attributed to have introduced the use of fire. All the remaining clans originate from other ethnic groups: from the Bambuka, Gomu, Leemak of Zo and Panya, the Mumuye or the Bandawa. Before they moved to their present site, the Munga Leelau lived in the hills at Panya with the Leemak. At one time the Munga Doso,[20] an Adamawa speaking ethnic group now living northeast of Karim Lamido, stayed with them at Panya. According to Hamman (2007:80) the Munga fought with the Fulbe jihadists early in the 19th century and first fled to Bandawa across the Benue and then moved to Panya. This explains the existence of a clan with Bandawa origin among them. Hamman (2007:27) further states that the Munga are of Jen extraction, without, however, differentiating between Munga Leelau and Munga Doso. As there is no such tradition among the Munga Leelau, and the Munga Doso speak a language belonging to the Jen sub-group of Adamawa, it is most likely that Hamman is referring to the Munga Doso.

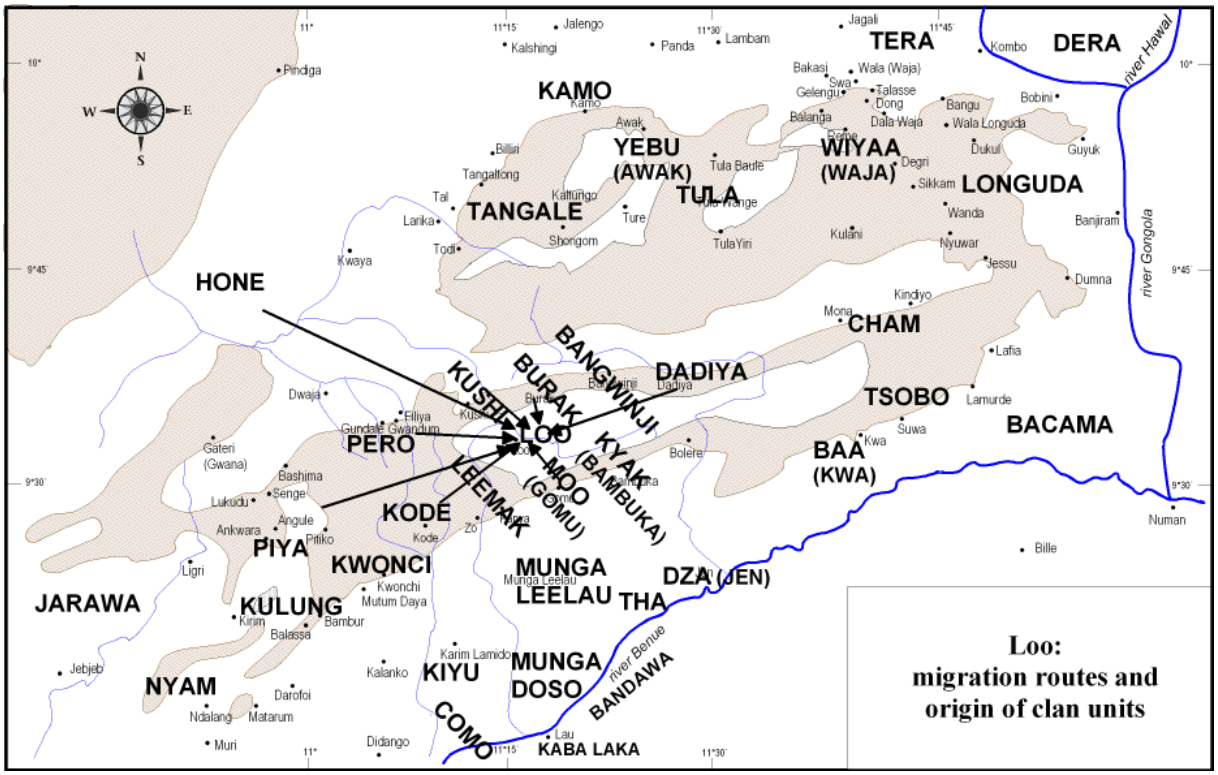
[20] See Benson & Andrason 2022 for a linguistic study of Mingang Doso.



Map 11. Munga Leelau migrations

3.2.3.5. Loo

The Loo [ldo] inhabit the valley between the northern and southern ranges of the Muri Mountains; a focus of settlement is Mount Damdid, an isolated hill within the valley. They may number about 8,000 people (Ethnologue 2025) and consist of two sections: the Shungo in the north and the Taadam in the south, each consisting of several clans and lineages. The most numerous section is Shungo. According to their traditions, all of their clans and lineages are allochthonous, i.e. they came from other ethnic groups such as Gomu, Kushi, Pero, Wurkun, Jukun, Burak, Kode or Dadiya (see also CAPRO 1992:58). The first clan to have settled at Mount Damdid were the Lou, and supposedly were the name-givers for the whole ethnic group. Map 12 illustrates the putative migrations into the Loo area.

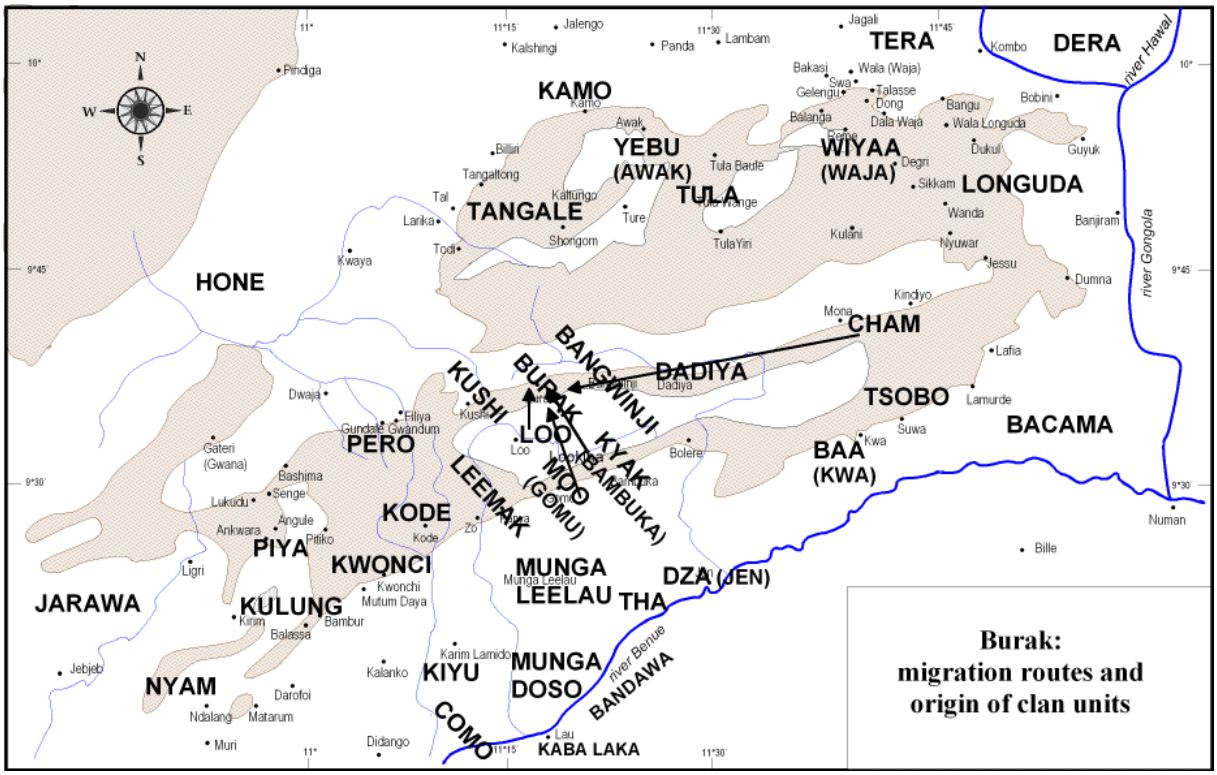


Map 12. Loo migrations

3.2.3.6. Burak

The Burak [bys] live approximately to the north of the Loo, with their present settlement area along the northern range of the Muri Mountains. They number about 7,500 people according to the census of 1991. They lived further south until the early 20th century, on the ridge of the mountains of the northern range and in the basin immediately to the south. They are subdivided into the two sections Nyuwalimi and Taadam. Originally, they came from a hill called Lookina in the vicinity of Gomu mountain and moved to Damgok, a hill in the northern range of the Muri Mountains; from here they descended into the plains to the north. Some clans state that they came from the area of the Loo and the Gomu, who are their linguistic relatives, and one clan, the Danga, claims to have come from Jaa in the Cham area and, as such, may well be related to the autochthonous Jalaabe. Map 13 illustrates the migrations which compose the present-day Burak clans.

A different version of the origin of the Burak was recorded by the British officer Mathews (NAK Bau Prof 231 F 1934:36) in the 1930s: he says that they came from east of Shellen under the leadership of Nganang, and stayed first at Lakudi hill west of the Gongola river, and then migrated together with the Kushi, Loo, Tara (= Kode) and Pero to the Muri Mountains. Neither this route nor the name of this ancestor is mentioned in any of the traditions collected by us or local field assistants. Thus, it may well be that Mathews mistook the tradition of a single clan for the whole ethnic group, as was already observed in the case of the Bangwinji.



Map 13. Burak migrations

3.2.3.7. Dza [=Jen]

The Dza [jen] live on the northern banks of the river Benue. According to Ethnologue (2025) they number 100,000 people; this, however, seems much too high for this small group, especially when compared to the population figures of the larger Bacama or Waja. According to our own observations, which are based on the numbers of registered taxpayers in 1993, they may number about 4,700. The Jen claim to have come from the east, from a region called Za near Medina in Arabia, via Borno, Sokoto and Zaria. It seems that they first settled around Numan before they were pushed further downstream to their present settlement area by the advancing Bacama (CAPRO 1992:59; Meek 1931a, Vol. 2:519; Stevens 1973:370ff).[21]

3.2.4. Longuda

The Longuda [lnu] count about 32,000 people (Ethnologue 2025), distributed over the borderland between Gombe State and Adamawa State. They are divided into five major dialect subgroups (Kleinewillinghöfer 2019). Like many other groups they claim to have originally come from Yemen and to have first settled at Kukawa in Borno, then at Dikwa and Shani before moving to Wanda, probably in the 18th century. From Wanda the Longuda dispersed into various settlements such as, for instance, Nyuwar or Guyuk (Bairah 1987:3-9; CAPRO 1995:256-259; Meek 1931a, Vol. 2:332f; Berg 1996:63ff). Their system of descent has been defined "…as matrilineal system with complementary agnatic groups" (Berg 1996:59).

3.3. Niger-Congo

3.3.1. Jarawan Bantu: Kulung

The Kulung [bbu] are the immediate western neighbours of the Piya. At the time of survey, they may have been 15,000 people, although according to Ethnologue (2025) they now number 40,000. The Kulung are divided into the regional sections Balassa, Bambur and Bamingun, each of which falls into patrilineal clans and lineages. Some sources add Banyam. The regional

[21] For a study of the Jen cluster of languages see Othaniel 2017.

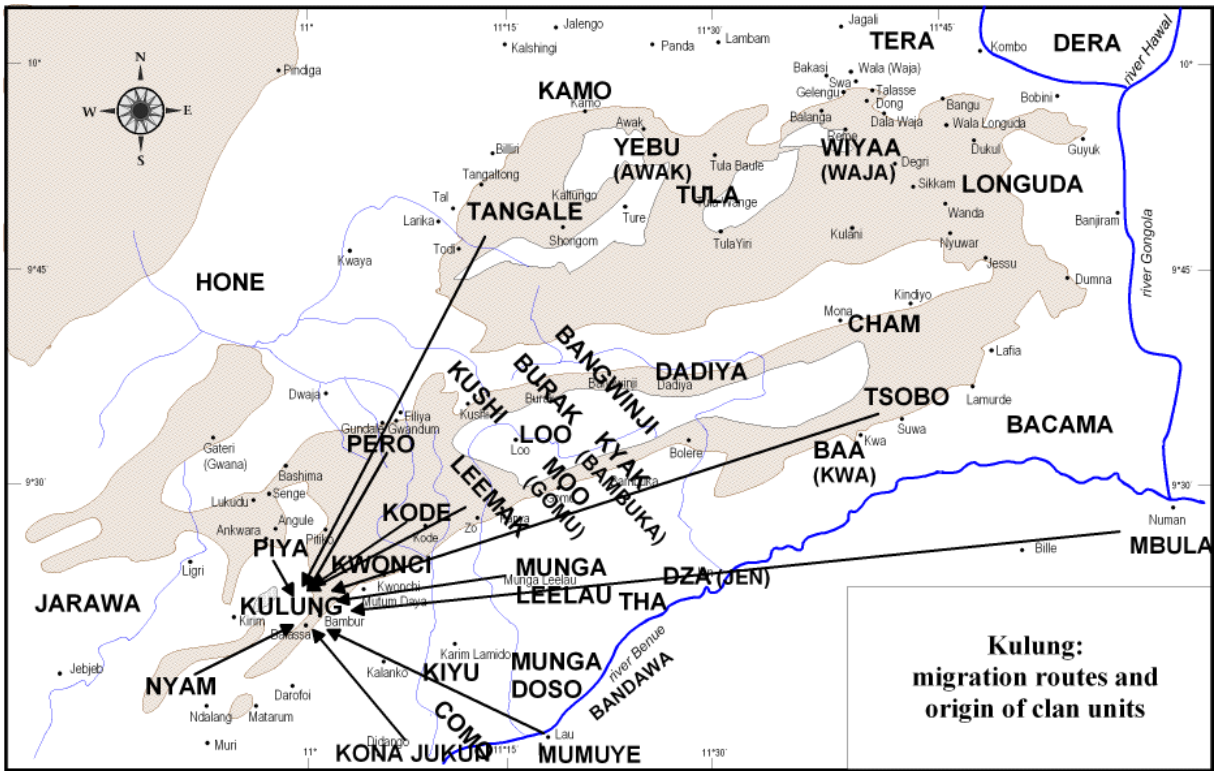
centre of the Balassa is the mountain of the same name; that of the Bambur lies east of Balassa, and the Bamingun are even further east, bordering the Kwonci. The Bamingun are an offshoot of the Kwonci from a section with the same name. The main Kulung settlements are Bambur, Balassa, Banyam and Kirim, all located along the southern range of the western Muri Mountains.

Map 14. Jarawan Bantu[22]

Previously, the western Muri Mountains (or Wurkun hills), were considered to have been the area from which Jarawan Bantu-speakers in Bauchi Province, such as Jarawa or Mbaru, had dispersed (Ballard 1971:299-300). In a more recent study, Eldridge Mohammadou (2020), who undertook a comparative study of the various Jarawan Bantu groups in Northern Nigeria and Cameroon, suggests that droughts in the early 18th century triggered a series of migrations that brought Jarawan Bantu speakers from an area in the eastern Upper Benue Basin along the River Benue to Mbula and then to the Muri Mountains, from where they later dispersed towards the northwest into what is now Bauchi State. Such a late date is not plausible, as Jarawan Bantu languages are extremely internally diverse. Their plausible homeland is in Southern Cameroon and they first migrated to the centre of Cameroon, then to the north. Following that they turned westward into the Benue Valley, shedding isolated populations *en route*. After leaving Kulung, they moved both to the Bauchi Plateau and the region south of the Jos Plateau. Some of this can be seen on the synthesis presented in Map 14.

[22] The Jarawan languages shown within Nigeria and Cameroon (CC) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jarawan_languages#/media/File:Map_of_the_Jarawan_languages.svg), adapted by Roger Blench.

The Kulung of Balassa in particular see themselves as closely connected to the Piya groups with whom they form the core of the Wurkun cluster. The mountains in Filiya/Gwandum area are their place of origin. Kulung traditions claim historical connections with the Jukun of Gwana, north of the Muri Mountains, and the Jukun of Kona, on the southern banks of the river Benue. Many clans refer to hills in or around the Muri Mountains as places of origin. Some clans of the Bambur-Kulung claim that they migrated from Mbula, a Jarawan Bantu-speaking group living near the Gongola–Benue confluence. This is plausible, since the languages are closely related. Other clans originated from groups such as the Pero, Piya, Mumuye, Munga Leelau, Kode, Kwonci, Nyam, Leemak of Zoo, Jukun of Kona, Tangale or Tsobo. In some more general traditions they say that the Wurkun people came from Ngazargamu in Borno, moved to Garwa[23] then to Daashing east of Yola; from here the Piya went to Shellen and the Kulung to Balassa (see also Saleh 2010:4-16). Claims of migration from Borno can be seen as aspirational rather than true historical tradition. Map 15 shows the claimed migrations into Kulung from multiple directions.



Map 15. Migrations into Kulung

3.3.2. Jukunoid

The presence of Jukun-speaking groups in the Muri Mountains area was much more extensive in the past, but was diminished by the onslaught of Fulani conquests since the early 19th century. Nowadays, Jukun groups are only found at the periphery of the mountains in the northeast (Hone) and south (Wurbo groups). Muri was a settlement which was originally inhabited by the Jukun group Je Muri before these were routed by the Fulani jihadists. In traditions of the Pero it is mentioned that on their arrival at Mount Yuru, close to present day Filiya, they met Jukun living there. These Jukun moved on and founded Antang Kwana, situated between Filiya and Gwandum, the ruins of which are said to be still visible, before they migrated further to Pindiga and Gwana. Probably these were the Jan Awei, remnants of whom were reported by Anne Storch (Blench 2022:48).

[23] Identification is not certain, probably Garoua.

The traditions of origin of the Jukun are largely uniform and are strongly coloured by Islamic influences and what has been termed the Kisra effect (Stevens 1975); they all claim a putative origin from the east, from Yemen, Mecca or Egypt and then migrated through the Sudanic Zone to their former centres of power on the river Benue. These traditions have been discussed by many authors – e.g. the comprehensive overview by Peter Rusch (1995) – and are not repeated here. From a linguistic point of view, the expansion of the Jukun languages was roughly from the south, from a region south of the river Benue along the Cameroonian border, to the north (Shimizu 1980).

3.3.2.1. Hone

Pindiga and Gwana (also known as Gateri) are the main towns of the Hone [juh] who may number about 6.000 people. Storch (2010) presents a discussion of Pindiga historical traditions in which Yemen, Khartoum and Ngazargamu are mentioned as way points on their migrations. In a report from 1929, the District Officer Walker (SNP 17 – 12250) relates that according to the Galadima of Pindiga they came from the northeast and passed through Kantanna Pinga (old Pindiga) on to Jibu and to Birnin Kwararafa where there was two years drought scattering people to Wukari, Takum etc. and to Atagara. The Pindiga ancestors Zankar and Nyimkane went from Kwararafa due to dispute to the north and settled at Kantanna where still extensive town remains can be seen and mounds which are graves of chiefs. They found the area occupied by a population group whose chief was called Kiuyaa.

At Gwana Adelberger recorded a tradition listing locations typical for the Jukun migratory route: they came from the east, from Misra (Egypt) via Yamel, Bima Hill, Dadinkowa to Kwararafa, from here some went to Wukari, some to Kushi, from here to Kwaya and then to Pindiga, some stayed at Pindiga Dutse, others went to Futuk, Wom and then to Gwana/Gateri. In a nutshell this tradition contains essential elements of their history as expounded by Meek in his unpublished report on the Jukun of Gwana from 1928 (NAK SNP 17 - K 2441 vol. iv). He writes that the inhabitants describe their town as Mutuk and themselves as people of Mutuk or Jemtuk, i.e children of Jɛmtuk. All sevens clans of Gwana are derived from that ancestor who was a titleholder from Pindiga ruling Pittuk (Futuk). Gateri was a chief who ruled around 1849-1874. The Jemtuk had been driven by the Fulani of Bauchi and Gombe from Pittuk to Kolla and then Adizi. The Jukun town Yangkari was destroyed by the Fulani and Gateri retreated into the plains of Bashama (in the northern Muri Mountains) where he was well received by the Wallo (Piya), who requested him to withdraw to the hills and he founded the first town of Gateri. Here the Jemtuk remained for 10 years and in around 1869 moved to Gwana where Gateri died in 1874.

3.3.2.2. Bandawa

The Bandawa (who call themselves Yishu; Meek NAK SNP 17 – 21577:30), are linguistically a part of the Shoo-Minda-Nye sub-group [bcv] of the Wurbo cluster. They state they came from Wukari and were part of the Kwararafa kingdom; they travelled with the Kona to a mountain Kona-Garo, where they left the Kona and proceeded to Shito about 6 km away from Lau Habe. From here they crossed the Benue to fish, for fear of the Karinjo, with whom they had been at war. Finally, they settled at Bandawa village (N.N. n.d. [“History of Bandawa People in Karim Lamido L.G.A.”]).

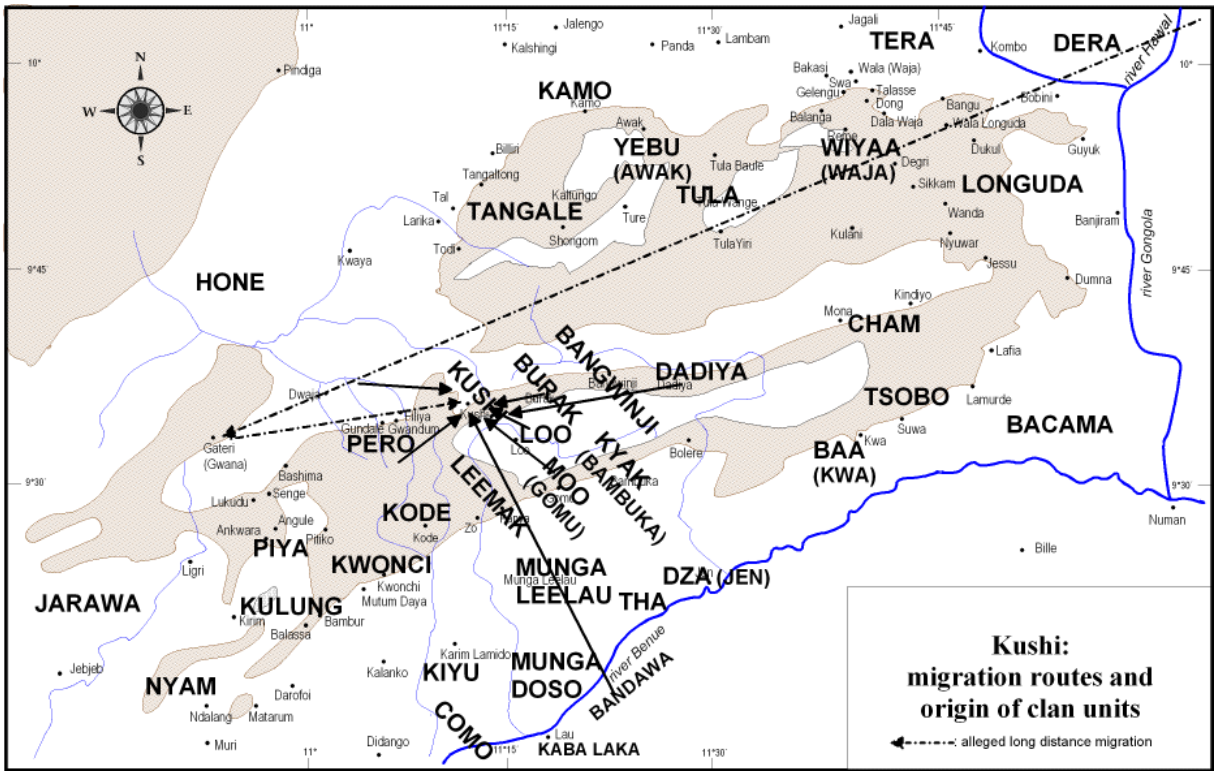
3.3.2.3. Como-Karim

The Karinjo/Karimjo call themselves Kiyu and inhabit the town Karim Lamido; together with the riverain Como, who join them directly to the south, they form the Como-Karim sub-group [cfg] of the Wurbo cluster. The Kiyu claim to have come either with the Jukun from the east or from Wukari under their leader Takwi Tuwo. The Como, calling themselves Ladthu/la-dhu, are

predominantly fishermen and the major source of the *boori* or *mam* cult widespread in the area (Meek NAK SNP 17 – 21577:29-33).[24]

3.4. Chadic
3.4.1. West Chadic
3.4.1.1. Kushi

The western neighbours of the Burak are the Kushi [kuh], numbering about 7,000 people (cf. Brunk [1994:70-71], based on the population census of 1991). They are subdivided into several clans, of which only one, the Fojorak, is considered to be autochthonous to the area; all the others came from various hills in the vicinity or from other ethnic groups such as the Burak, Loo, Gomu, Dadiya or even the Bandawa on the banks of the river Benue. In their traditions, the Kushi claim that they originally migrated from Borno, then stayed at Gwana, before moving further into the hills of the Muri Mountains.[25]



Map 16. Migrations into Kushi

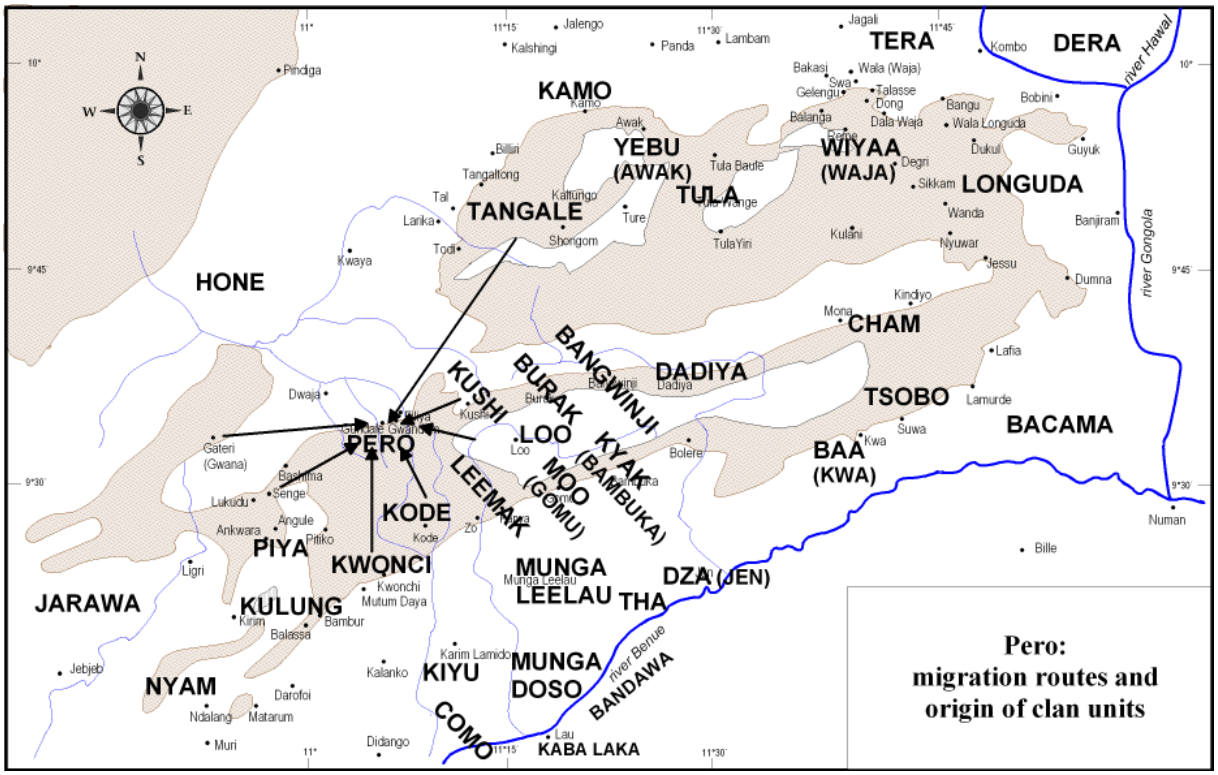
The information given by Mathews (NAK Bau Prof 231 F 1934:37), that they came from the east together with the Pero, Tangale, Burak, Kode and Loo, has to be considered with caution as this most probably relates only to a fraction of the Kushi. Map 16 shows the potential routes of these migrations. Mathews further tells us that first they lived on the plains at the foot of the Kushi hills but then moved into the hills due to attacks by the Kaltungo-Tangale. His remark that on their way to their present area they were given food by the Dadiya, who were already established at their settlement area, is interesting, however, and offers a possible clue to a relative chronology.

[24] For the *mam* cult and associated sculpture see Rubin 2011.

[25] Manuscript (hereafter ms.) by Samson Waziri. See also CAPRO (1995:148) and Batic 2017. The latter is a recent study of the origins of the Kushi based on oral traditions. Batic has also published on the Kushi language, see for instance Batic 2019a.

3.4.1.2. Pero

Filiya, Gwandum and Gundale are the three main settlements of the Pero [pip]. The Pero may number about 25,000 people according to Ethnologue (2025). Linguistically and culturally, they are very similar to the Piya, their western neighbours. The Pero are subdivided into various clans, many of whom regard Mount Yuru, a peak of the northern Muri Mountains just close to their present settlement area, as their place of origin. The footprints of one of their ancestors and his wife are imprinted in the rock on Mount Yuru.[26] Some Pero clans came from the Kushi, Kwonci, Kode, Piya or the Tangale and one is from Gwana, a Jukun town to the northwest, and accordingly claims origin from Kwararafa. Map 17 shows the migrations constituting Pero. The first Pero group to have settled on Mount Yuru was the Dimbira clan, their ancestor is said to have originally come from the east or Dadiya area and met Jukun living on Mount Yuru, who then moved on to settle at Gwana and Pindiga eventually. Probably these were the Jan Awei, a perished Jukun group mentioned by Storch (2011:191) and Blench (2022). A slightly different version for their origin is given by the researchers of CAPRO (1995:283-284) who relate that one part of the Pero came from a place called Durungu, probably in Adamawa state, and one part from Wase passing through Gwok; but this only seems to reflect the traditions of a few selected clans.



Map 17. Migrations into Pero

[26] Adelberger was able to visit the site with the footprints on Mount Yuru: these imprints on the rock have roughly the outline of a human foot together with round, shallow holes, that were most probably created by alluvial erosion.

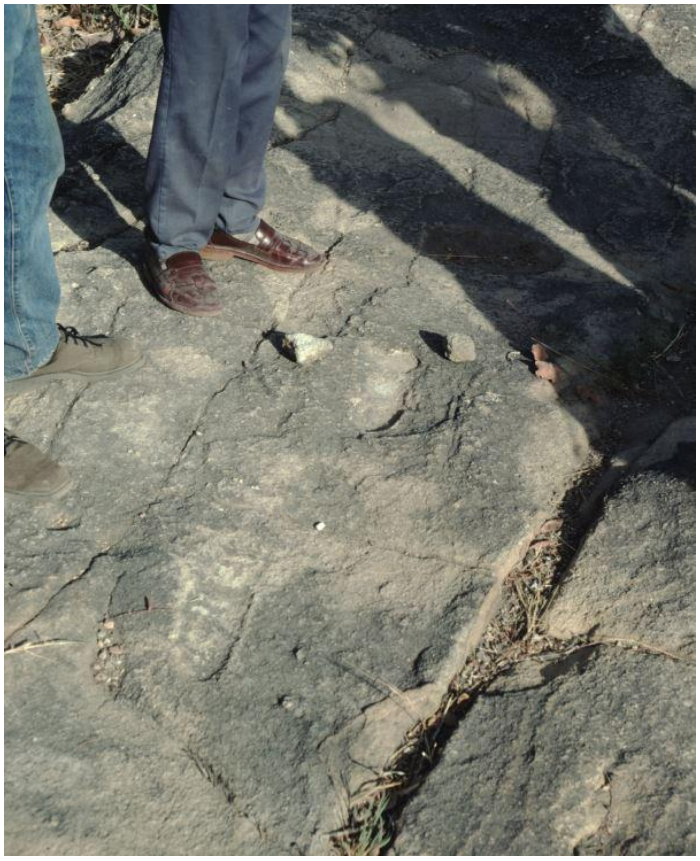


Photo 1. Imprints on a rock at Mount Yuru (© J. Adelberger)

3.4.1.3. Piya

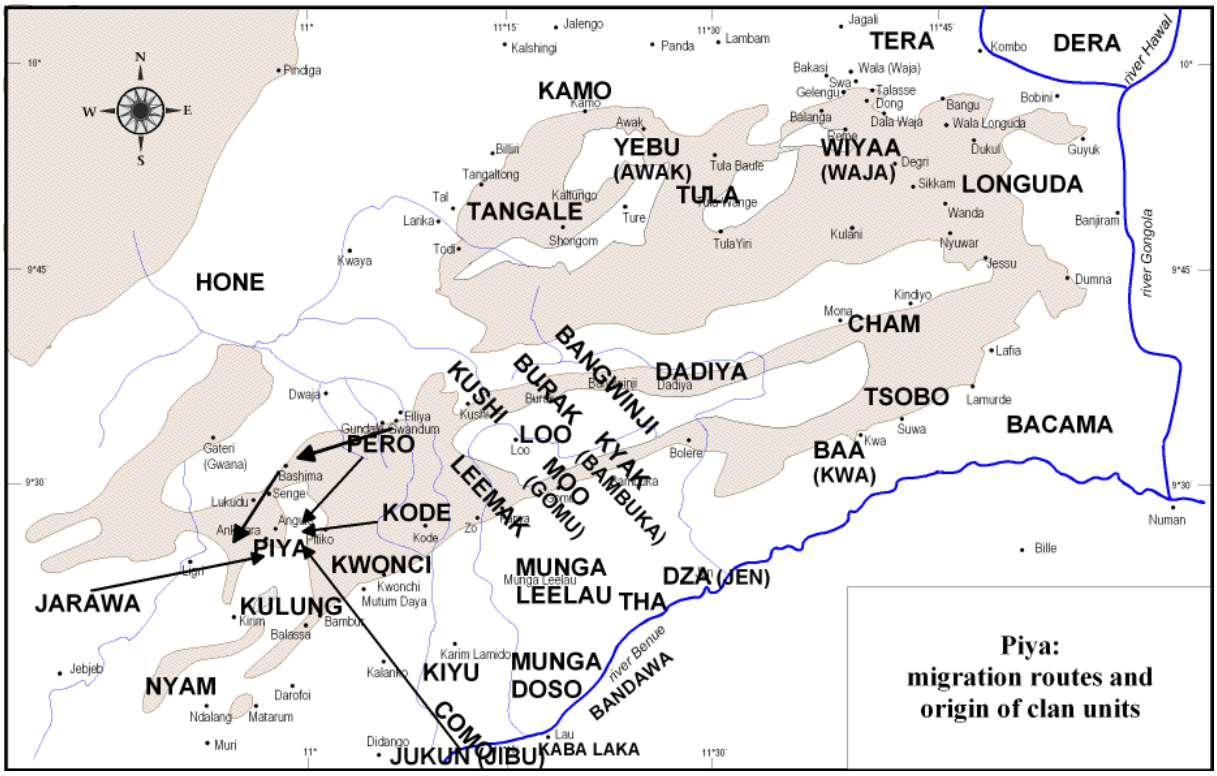
The Piya [piy] are a comparably large ethnic group, numbering about 20,000 people[27] and consisting of five regional sections: the Wallo in the area around Mounts Angule and Ankwara, the Kulu in the Bacama area, (not to be confused with the Bacama on the river Benue), around the Tondolo and Kakala mountains, the Pireego in Pitiko area southwest to Bacama, and the Peelang and Gaaruma in the area of Mount Kunshenu to the northwest of Zelany on the borders with the Jarawa people. The Piya are subdivided into many clans, most of which say they originated from mountains in their respective settlement areas. Principally, they consider Mount Andeng, slightly to the south of Mount Yuru at Filiya, as their centre of origin from where they dispersed in a westerly direction and settled on the hills along the western chain of the Muri Mountains. The time when this movement may have taken place is difficult to assess, although obviously slave raids by Emir Yakubu of Bauchi in the first half of the 19th century triggered a wave of migrations to the west (see Adelberger 2009; NAK Yola Prof K.5/SII, Gazetteer of Adamawa Province 1936:99). An earlier initial migration is suggested in a British colonial report, putting the date around 1750:

> … some older men and one in particular at the village of Walkali state that quite 150 years ago the Wurkumawa immigrated from Gwendon [Gwandum] in the North East and originally settled on the summit of Balassa hill, from where they pushed out colonies north and west, namely Angule, Ankwara, Walkali and Bashima […]. Simultaneously with this movement from Gwendon, many Jukums from Kwona crossed to the north bank of the Benue and formed a colony at the foot of Kulum Hill in the south eastern portion of the district within a few miles of Balassa. They also pushed out colonies west, and the ancestors of the present generation are said to have founded the

[27] According to Ethnologue (2025) they only number 5,000, which seems too low given the extent of their settlement area.

town of Kirum 30 years ago (NAK Ministry for Local Government – 4377/1912, Muri Province: Wurkum Pagan District, Assessment Report by T. H. Haughton; see also Fremantle 1972:27).[28]

There are further clans with an origin from other ethnic groups such as Jarawa, Pero, or Kode, and one is from Jibu (Jukun). The Piya and Kulung are the core groups of the Wurkun cluster and 'Wurkun' is often used synonymously for both groups. From local traditions, it seems that in pre-colonial times the Wurkun groups defined themselves primarily with reference to the mountains they lived on. Map 18 shows the migrations constituting Piya.

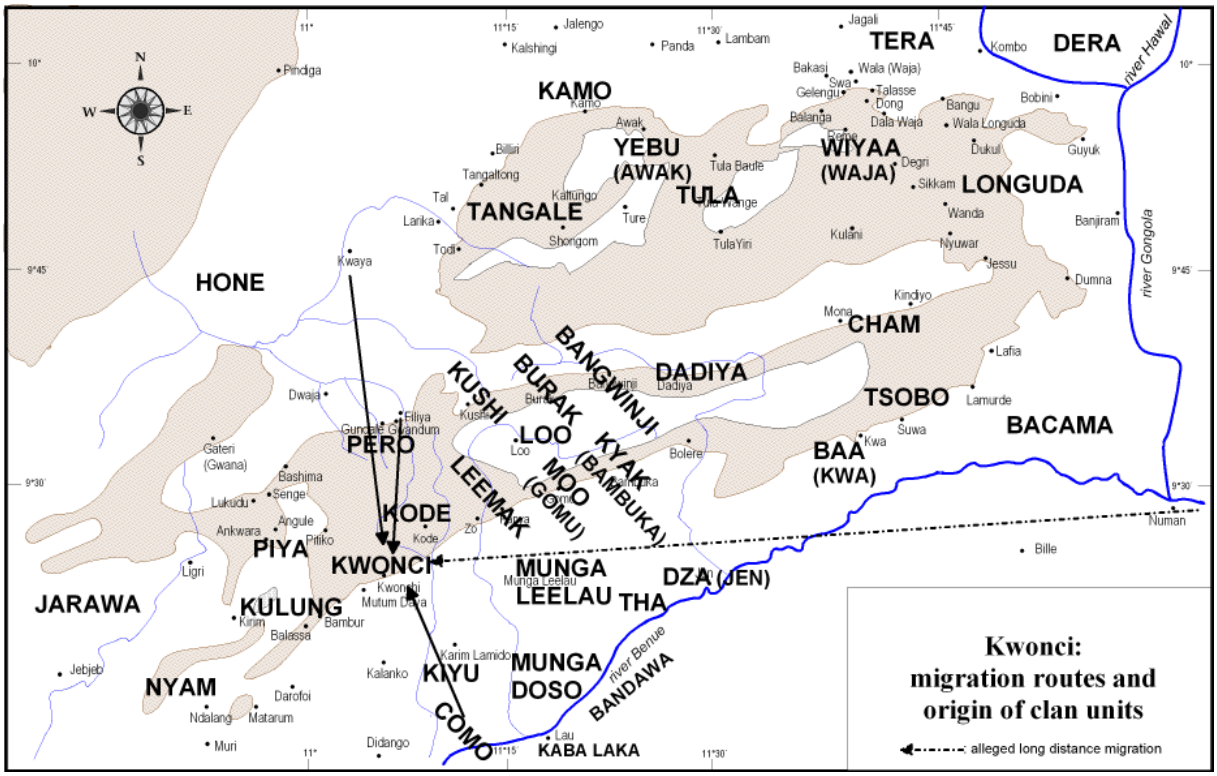


Map 18. Migrations into Piya

3.4.1.4. Kwonci

The Kwonci [piy] live between the Kode and the Piya; their language is very close to that of the Piya. They number about 4,000 people. Mount Arkwatong was their centre of settlement in pre-colonial times. The Kwonci consist of several clans, most of them have an origin from mountains in the vicinity. Two kindreds claim to have come from Cameroon via Numan, another two are from Kwararafa, yet another two clans are from Pero area, and one is from Kwaya to the north of the Muri Mountains. The Mirzem clan is considered to be their oldest clan and its ancestor is said to have stepped down from heaven. Imprints left by the footprints of that ancestor, by his dog and his spear can be seen on a rock on Mount Arkwatong. The Bamingun section – consisting of several clans – partially moved to the neighbouring Kulung, probably in the late colonial or early independence era. Map 19 shows the hypothetical map of migrations into Kwonci contributing to its current status.

[28] Probably the migrations at that period may be linked to a heavy period of drought affecting the whole region around 1740-1750 (cf. Tarhule & Woo 1997:613).

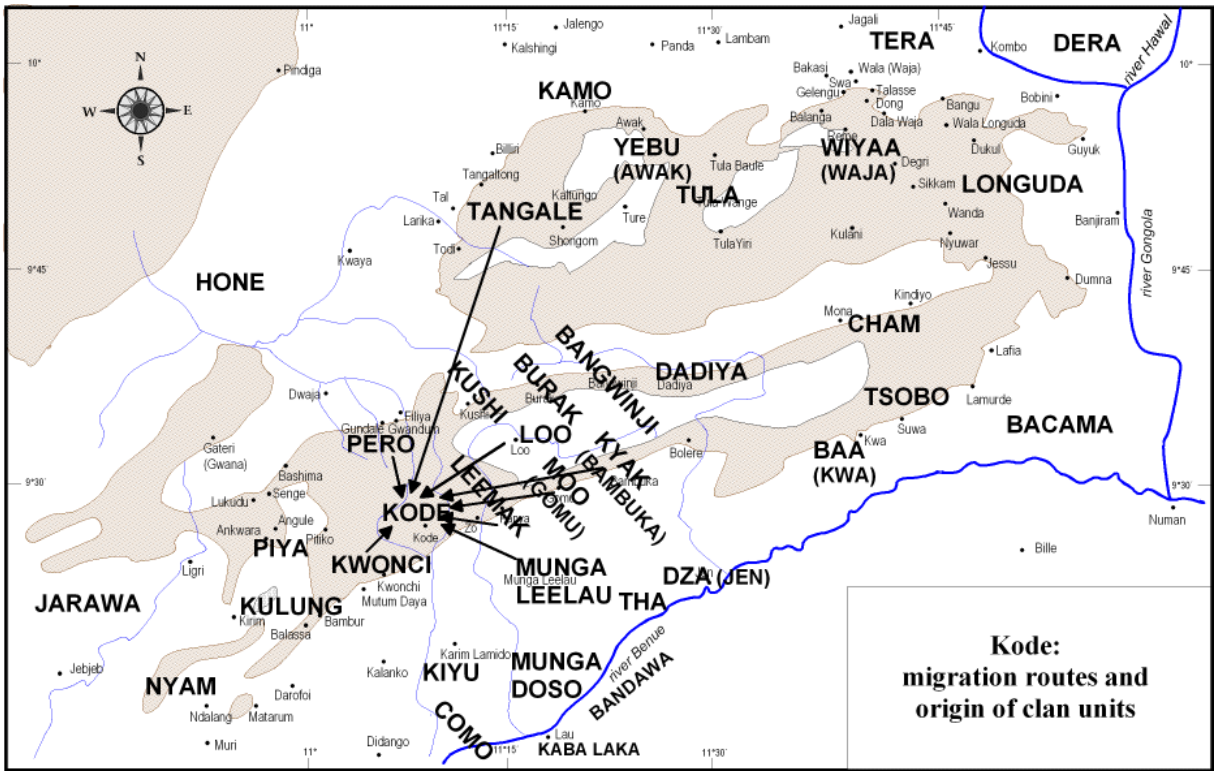


Map 19. Migrations into Kwonci

3.4.1.5. Kode [Widala]

The Kode, or Widala as they call themselves, numbering about 4,500 people (Ethnologue 2025) consist of two sections: the Kholok [ktc] and the Maghdi [gmd] (or Tala, as they are called by the Kholok); each section speaking its own language. While the Kholok language is a Chadic language, the Tala language is classified as a Northwestern Adamawa language of Benue-Congo and belongs to the cluster of Bikwin languages. As their own designation Maghdi (= Mak of the home) indicates, the Tala have a strong historical connection with the Mak (Leemak) of Zoo, their eastern neighbours. Both sections are subdivided into several clans and lineages. Some of these clans seem to be autochthonous such as the Fobelmi and the Dira who originated from a cave.

The latter are said to have introduced the use of fire. The ancestor of the Kooyang came down from heaven and his footprints can still be seen on Mount Kode (Mount Yanna). The majority of the clans of the Tala came from Zo where they left due to conflicts. Other clans came from the Loo, Gomu, Bambuka, Kwonci, Pero or the Tangale. Most of the clans migrated from different mountains in the vicinity (Mounts Wala, Yanna or Korok).

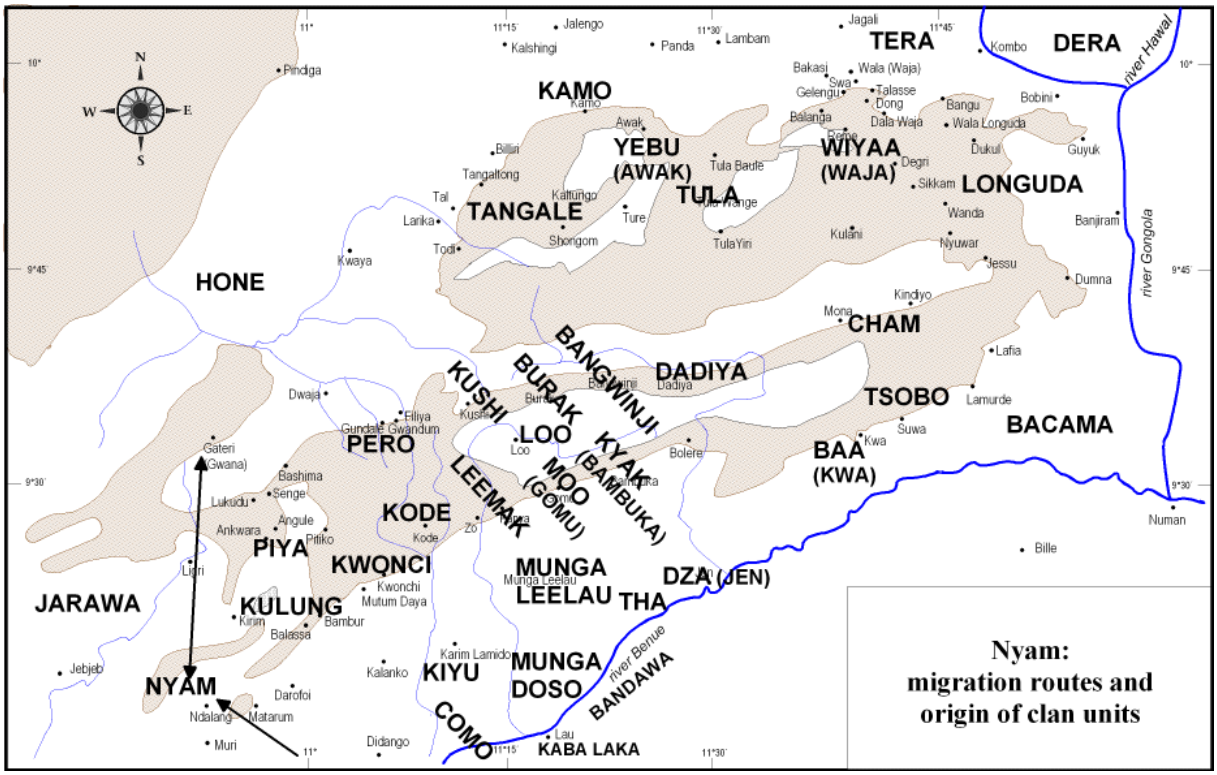


Map 20. Migrations into Kode

3.4.1.6. Nyam

In the far western foothills of the Muri Mountains, lives the small group of the Nyam [nmi], the westernmost representatives of the Bole-Tangale language group who may number about 5,000 people (Andreas 2012:1).[29] Their main settlements are Andamin and Ndalang. The majority of their clans claim to have originated from Kwararafa under the leadership of a person called Andukwe or Anduka. One clan (the Nyirgang) is regarded as autochthonous to the area and is said to be derived from a clan of the Kunshenu or Peelang section of the Piya whom they met on their arrival at Ndalang hill. Due to constant attacks by the Fulani from Bauchi and Muri in the 19th century, some Nyam moved to the Jukun town of Gateri (or Gwana) and returned at the beginning of the 20th century (IAI cons. 2 box 2(4):26, McBride; McBride n.d.:15-22), this may have had an influence on their traditions insofar as they took over traditions of origin from the host community. Map 21 shows the migrations which may have contributed to Nyam ethno-genesis.

[29] Ethnologue (2025) gives their number as 100, which is much too low.



Map 21. Migrations into Nyam

The Nyam have been studied by Andreas (2012) who provides some basic information on their location, settlements and lifestyle. Nyam is of particular interest since it is an example of a language which is Chadic but which has been dramatically restructured by contact with Adamawa. Almost all of its phonology resembles Adamawa languages and the characteristic Chadic morphology has been lost. This argues strongly that at some point in the past, the Nyam came under strong Adamawa cultural influence. They do not live in close contact with an Adamawa language today, so when and where this occurred is unknown. Further linguistic analysis may resolve the issue.

3.4.1.7. Tangale

The Tangale [tan] are a dominant group in the area to the north of the Muri Mountains, probably numbering about 200,000 people (Ethnologue 2025).[30] They claim to have migrated from the northeast in a movement of seven steps, including the sites of Ngazargamu, Biu, Gombe and Shani. Partly they say to have ultimately come from Mak in Bornu, partly from Yemen as so many other groups in the region do. James (2020:120-122) gives the following places as stages in their migration: from Mak (at Lake Chad) to Kubi, to Poduka, to Pokwakwa, to Kina (near Gombe), to Kalshingi/Kumbe and, finally, to Tungul/Tungo hills. The identification of most of these sites remains obscure. From the vicinity of Gombe they are said to have been driven south by the Bolewa to Tungul (or Tungo) which is about 9 km north of Kaltungo (NAK Bau Prof 231F, 1934:2-4; CAPRO 1995:207, 316). At Tungul a quarrel occurred that led to their division into East- (Kaltungo/Shongom) and West-Tangale (Biliri/Tangaltong), or that they were driven out of Tungul by a plague of insects. They moved to their present locations where they met an aboriginal population: the Shongom found a people called Kwomta which they drove out, some of these went to Ture (East Tangale) and some to Tangaltong (West Tangale) by whom they were absorbed.

[30] Jungraithmayr (1991, 2002) has extensively studied the Tangale language.

The Tal section of West-Tangale speak of the Bandara as autochthonous people whom they hence integrated, and the Tangale of Todi speak of the Burre people who inhabited the rock west of their town (SNP 7-968/1912 T. F. Carlyle, 1912). According to other sources the Biliri (West Tangale) met the Kwalili and Bekeri peoples as original settlers in their area (Poswal n.d.:2).

3.4.2. Central Chadic: Bacama

The Bacama [bcy], numbering about 150,000 people (Ethnologue 2025), claim to have come originally from Sokoto and to have migrated via Gobir to Dyemsa Pwa on the upper Benue river from where they split into several sections and moved to their present area of settlement around the Gongola-Benue confluence. Stevens argues that the Bacama arrived in this area well before the 19th century and the start of the Fulani jihad (Stevens 1973:71ff, 545 [Map 3]; also Meek 1931a, Vol 1:2). There are clans among the Bacama with an origin from the Mumuye, Tula, Jen, Chamba and Tsobo (Meek 1931a, Vol. 1:7f).[31]

3.5. Central Sudanic

One of the more surprising populations in this region is the Kaba Laka/Lau Habe (see under Bandawa for their location). They were first reported in Shimizu 1980 although he collected no data on the language. This settlement is around 500 persons and according to a survey in 2016 they speak a Central Sudanic language of the Sara-Bongo-Bagirmi cluster (Idiatov & Van der Velde 2020). This only emerged from analysis of a wordlist and it is very unclear how they came to be so remote from their home area in South-Central Chad. Since the language they speak is not very different from those recorded in Chad, it may be that either they arrived as a migrant fishing population, or they were escaping slave raiding.

4. General observations

4.1. Mythical origins

The putative origin from a Near Eastern location like Yemen, so often encountered in traditions of origin of the groups under discussion as well as of the wider region, may be considered as an attempt to counter the pressure exercised by Islamic polities with superior political power, the so called *kisra* effect (Stevens 1975). Furthermore, the common claim of origin from a historical centre of power, such as one of the ancient cities of Bornu, may be interpreted as an attempt to associate with the former glory of these sites, and is a means of emphasizing relations as an important historical experience and trope in accounts of history. However, there is also the possibility that it may reflect historical developments of past centuries as sketched further below.

It is only in the eastern Muri Mountains region that the memory of an autochthonous population has been preserved in the traditions and we may call ourselves fortunate that a relic of their language survived, allowing historical inferences based on comparative linguistic analyses. Such analyses have so far been undertaken on Adamawa languages of the eastern Muri Mountains and it is to be hoped that languages spoken in other parts of the Muri Mountains will be included for analysis in the future.

Jalaa is a language isolate most probably representing the last remnant of a language family once comprising more members in the area (Kleinewillinghöfer n.d.:2). The speakers of Jalaa represent an autochthonous population in the eastern Muri Mountains who were either dislodged or absorbed by the incursion of groups speaking Adamawa languages. The survival of Bangi Me among the Dogon is a comparable case (Blench 2018). While the claim of being the first settler is often contested among the clans comprising an ethnic group because land rights

[31] See Blench, Bulkaam & Ornan (n.d.) for a recent linguistic study of Bacama/Bata.

and other privileges may be derived from that claim, the attribution of an origin from a cave or a stream is a more reliable reminder of an autochthonous status.

In the western Muri Mountains, the groups have no traditions of an indigenous population but, on the contrary, state that they were the first dwellers and even reached their respective areas by moving underground and emerging out of a hole, thus stressing their own claim to autochthony. This may be interpreted in two ways: either there was, indeed, no earlier population in that area (which seems unlikely) or the migrations into the area and absorption of autochthonous groups took place in such ancient times that all memory of them is lost. Ballard (1971:299-300) argued from linguistic geography that Jarawan Bantu-speaking groups inhabited the western Muri Mountains and were pushed out by immigrating Chadic speakers, the Kulung as the remaining representative of these groups entering a coherent relationship with immigrating Piya. This seems unlikely, simply because Jarawan Bantu are closely related languages and are probably the most recent migrants.

Autochthonous population elements are usually associated with the earth and often their primeval position is acknowledged by their control of rituals associated with the annual agricultural cycle. Among the Bambuka, where the Nwaasok, who are said to have originated from a cave, must be the first to sow grains at the beginning of the new season. Authority over such rituals is, however, not conclusive evidence for autochthony because, in the course of time, significant rituals may have come under the control of a dominant, more recent group with an origin from outside the mountains. Recorded clan histories indicate that a considerable amount of inter-group migrations and assimilation of population parts both from neighbouring and from more distant groups took place.

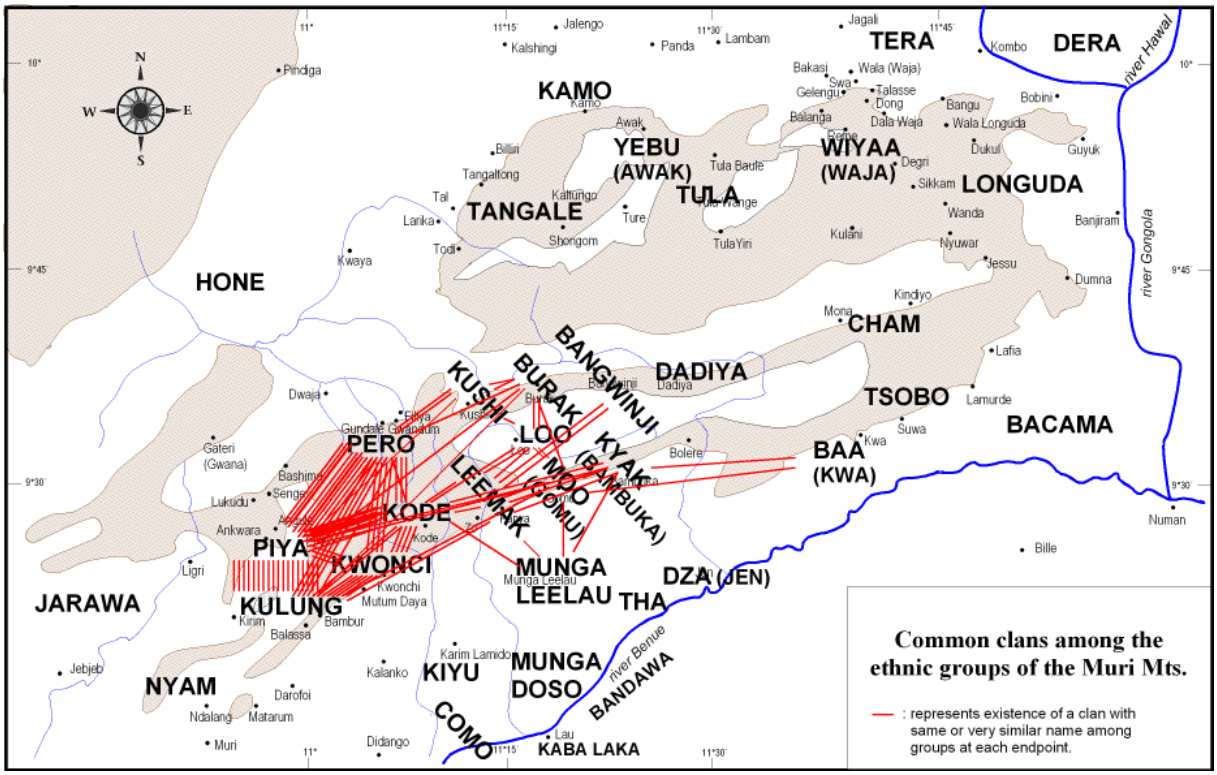
4.2. Shared clan names

By doing a systematic comparison of the names of descent groups of all the ethnic groups in the Muri Mountains, 70 different names can be identified which are shared by two, three or more clans belonging to different ethnic groups. Sometimes the names are identical: there is, for instance, a clan named Ampoxoram among the Piya, the Kulung and the Pero; sometimes the names are similar and are possible derivatives, which in some cases would, however, require further validation: for example, Danga in Burak, Dangse in Gomu, Dangera in Kulung and Dangara in Piya. This shows that clans did split and spawned new units moving between ethnic groups. In some cases, the historic relationship between clans bearing a common name is corroborated by oral tradition. For example, the Fore clan of the Loo is said to have its origin in Kode, where there is also a clan named Fore. Another example is the Dongo clan among the Kushi whose origin is from Burak where there is a clan called Donge. On the whole, in 22 cases out of the 70 the relationship is substantiated by an associated corroborative tradition of origin. While a similarity in name may be sufficient evidence for a relationship between clans, there are cases where there is a historical relationship not reflected in the name. For instance, a tradition of the Gomu tells that the Boogok clan has off-shoots among the Munga Leelau (the Munziga clan), the Kulung (the Bajiram clan) and the Bandawa, each of them carrying a different name (Tijani Magaji 1992 [ms.]). The Mungok clan of the Leemak of Panya traces its origin to the Nwadur clan of Gomu (Chiye 1991 [ms.]).

The concentration of descent groups with the same or a similar name is highest among ethnic groups who regard themselves as being close and belonging to the same supra-ethnic cluster, i.e. within the Wurkun or within the Bikwin cluster. With regard to a possible historically different composition of at least one of these clusters, it is significant to note that the Pero, who nowadays are not considered as a part of the Wurkun cluster, share many common clan names with other Wurkun groups, suggesting that, in the past, the Pero may well have been part of the Wurkun (as argued in Adelberger 1992). The analysis of shared clan names offers corroborative evidence to the scenario deduced from historical traditions of the Wurkun groups that approximately 300 years ago, in the northwestern Muri Mountains, communities were concentrated

on certain hills and mountains from where they subsequently spread and created the spatial distribution of Wurkun groups of more recent times.

Below the level of ethnic group, the distribution of shared clans represents a layer of corporate units transcending contemporary ethnic boundaries. Map 22 is a visualisation of the existing shared clan names among the ethnic groups in the Muri Mountains, whereby each red line represents a name existing in the ethnic groups at its endpoints.



Map 22. Shared clan names in the Muri mountains

The reasons stated in the traditions for migrating away are conflicts, droughts, poor harvest, plagues or sometimes haunting by evil spirits. Another possibility that would lead to the attribution of an external origin of a descent group are the cases where captives of war or pawns given to a group in exchange for foodstuff were able to establish a household of their own and reproduce. The latter case was documented especially among the Dadiya.

A general problem here is the question of chronology: in some cases, if at all, only a relative order of arrival could be reconstructed (who arrived first, second, etc.), but even this cannot be regarded as definitive because of the legitimising function of such traditions, which are often linked to land claims (and this fact was recognised by the informants interviewed). The claimed order of arrival may serve as a legitimisation of current land claims instead of being an historical account of in-migration. During the era of the Fulani Emirates, i.e. from the beginning of the 19th century onwards, a considerable number of migrations took place as whole groups tried to escape slave-raiding and looting by the Fulani and their allies, or they were displaced by attacks of the Emirate raiders (see Adelberger 2009). Since the colonial era, the Pax Britannica allowed people to resettle from their mountain dwellings to the plains and this down-hill movement was encouraged or even ordered by the administration (Adelberger, Brunk & Kleinewillinghöfer 1993). As late as the 1940s, for example, a considerable number of Tula Yiri emigrated to Bambam in Dadiya area due to pressure from the Tula Wange and settled there (Hamidu Saleh 1992 [ms.]).

4.3. Historical deductions from distribution of linguistic groups

The status of Jalaa as an isolate means it is plausible to hypothesise that

1. there was formerly a language phylum of which Jalaa constituted a part which could be called Jalaaic. It was much more widespread in the Muri Mountains than at present.
2. it was overwhelmed by waves of incoming populations until only this one remaining fragment was left.

The status of Baa is surprising; as an isolate within Adamawa, it was probably the first representative of Adamawa to reach the area and should also have had relatives which have now disappeared. Following the Baa, the Bikwin-Jen languages would have been the next to arrive. While most settled in the mountains, others became river people and became more specialised in aquatic subsistence. One group, the Tha, crossed the river and settled on the opposite bank. The Tula/Waja group is the one most obviously related to the Gur languages and may have expanded *in situ*, coming into contact with Bikwin-Jen when going further south.

The split between West and Central Chadic is clear in this area; we know that the Bole-Tangale languages were further north and moved down the west side of the Muri Mountains. The relatives of Ɓata-Bacama were from further north and moved to the Benue, east of the Adamawa languages. They show clear evidence of interaction with Adamawa languages. They have labial-velars – a Niger-Congo feature – and have lost much of the typical verb morphology of Central Chadic, arguing for intensive interaction.

The Kulung represent just one branch of widespread Jarawan Bantu (Map 14) and were the latest to reach the region and passing on from Mbula, Bille west of the Benue to Kulung and onwards to Bauchi and Plateau. The Jukunoid languages have their origin further south, and Kiyu represents one of the Wurbo riverine populations which have pushed into this area. The Central Sudanic language spoken at Lau, which looks like a quite recent movement, probably 18th century.

4.4. Environmental factors and historical events

The ethno-linguistic situation of the Muri Mountains area is characterised by a high degree of complexity which even multiplies when the sub-units of the ethno-linguistic groups are drawn into consideration. The complexity is associated with a population dynamic which is induced by factors like the pressure exercised by expanding or aggressive polities or by environmental stress. To this extent it looks like typical 'refuge areas' across West Africa, including the Atakora Mountains, the Jos Plateau and the Mandara Mountains.

In general, historical political events affecting the wider region as well as natural disasters, such as droughts, caused populations to migrate and seek safer or better living conditions in new areas. From the middle of the 16th century in particular, a series of droughts characterised the climate of the wider region (Maley & Vernet 2013).[32] Prolonged droughts and political disturbances in the region around Lake Chad caused the displacement of populations in past centuries (cf. Brunk & Gronenborn 2004:111-120), these may have had indirect repercussions as far as to the area of the Muri Mountains. Nonetheless, the origins of the mosaic of languages there must be significantly earlier.

A series of famines in the region of the Muri Mountains during the early years of the 1900s is documented, starting with a locust infestation in 1899, which is probably the one remembered in traditions of the Piya, who say that before the coming of the white men they experienced a

[32] For an overview of Northern Nigerian droughts 1600-1914 see also Tarhule & Woo 1997:615-616.

locust plague (called *kuchamchobo*), which made many of them leave Mount Andeng. Further, there were pests such as blight destroying crops and causing famine at the turn of the century.[33]

A general movement of people from the Lake Chad region in a south-westerly direction in past centuries has been noted (Jungraithmayr, Leger & Löhr 2004), leading to the establishment of Chadic speaking groups in the area of Northeastern Nigeria with the Muri Mountains as the southern terminus of the West Chadic Bole-Tangale languages.[34] One may note that such migrations are preserved in the oral traditions of nearly all the ethnic groups in the area, irrespective of their linguistic affiliation. Peoples speaking Adamawa languages have an earlier presence in the region in relation to speakers of Chadic languages and exhibit a much higher degree of internal differentiation. Their linguistic heterogeneity defies easy classification (Kleinewillinghöfer 2019).

Centralised empires, kingdoms and chiefdoms had an impact on the region for centuries. In addition to the better-studied empire of Kanem/Bornu, and the Fulani Emirates of the 19th century, there was the enigmatic Kwararafa confederacy, as well as other polities of which there is only scant knowledge, such as Pindiga and Gwana, the Bole kingdoms of Kalam and Gerikom in the area of the Gongola bend (Low 1972:81ff), the Bura/Babur kingdom on the Biu Plateau (Miller 1984) or the Dera kingdom of Shani on the Gongola-Hawal confluence (Davies 1954-1956:35), to list only a few, all of which may have played their part in the framework of Kwararafa.[35]

As early as ca. 1000 AD, with the foundation of the Kanem empire to the north-east of Lake Chad, people may have felt the need to emigrate. In the 14th century, the Seyfawa dynasty had to change their seat of empire to the west of Lake Chad due to conflicts with the Bulala, and Ngazargamu was founded as the new capital of Bornu in the 15th century (Johnston & Muffet 1973:61-62; Lavers 1980). The raids and military campaigns of Bornu covered a vast region well beyond the confines of the Sultanate (see Dewière 2017:259ff). Kanem to the east, as well as the Hausa states to the west, were put under the hegemony of Bornu. In the 16th century, Mai Idris Alauma of Bornu conquered Mandara, and he led war campaigns into the area of the northern bend of the river Gongola (Lange 1987:83f). Kanuri loanwords in the languages of many of the groups under discussion are evidence for the historical impact of Bornu (Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer, personal communication).

As a precursor to the jihad of Uthman Dan Fodio and the establishment of the hegemony of the emirates of Muri, Yola and Gombe, a migration of the Fulbe Kiri from the Lower Gongola valley, under the leadership of Hammarwa, took place along the Benue valley towards the site of Muri at the beginning of the 19th century. Firstly, they settled at Lake Dulum, near Jen, and then at Gowe, near Kunini. The Fulbe Kiri advanced the jihad movement and engaged local populations in skirmishes, except where these joined them as allies. The latter option was, for example, chosen by the Jen and the people of Kunini. The Fulbe and their allies eventually

[33] See Gazetteer of Adamawa Province 1936 (NAK Yolaprof K.5/SII:45, 162) where it is stated that 1904 was a year of unrest due to famine that had prevailed among the 'pagans' since the locust infestation of 1899, and only ended in 1908. In the annual report on Yola Province for 1906 (NAK SNP 7 – 1757/1907) we find the information that about 50% of the population of the 'pagan tribes' of the Gongola region died from starvation and large number are scattered in search of food. See also Weiss 1977 for a comprehensive treatment of historical droughts and plagues in the region, especially the map on p. 189.

[34] For an overview of these migrations on a regional level see Adelberger (2014:219-223).

[35] See also Abubakar 1989 for an overview of Kwararafan polities in the region; for a study of Dera (Kanakuru) migration routes see Berns (1986:342ff).

wrought power from the Jukun kingdom of Kona and established an emirate at Muri, dispersing the Je-Muri, a Jukun speaking group formerly occupying the area (cf. Hamman 2007:75-91).[36]

With the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate, a strongly increased demand for slaves developed, both for internal use in the Caliphate and for external trade as the main export item (see Mahadi 1992, Blench 2011). The non-Muslim peoples on the fringes of the emirates, i.e. the populations of the Benue valley, Jos Plateau and Mandara Mountains, were particular favourite targets for the slave raiding parties. The Emirate of Muri, for instance, was in constant demand of slaves. It is estimated that Muri had to send 100-500 slaves to Sokoto annually. And there were about 40 agricultural slave settlements around Muri at the end of the 19th century (Hamman 2007:102, 112). While the actions of the Fulani Emirates of the 19th century against people of the Muri Mountains are documented, at least to a certain degree (see also Adelberger 2009, 2017), only very little is known about the effects on the area by earlier polities such as the Kwararafa empire.

4.5. Kwararafa

Another factor in population movements may have been the evolution of Kwararafa, a somewhat enigmatic empire that had an influence on the region that is now Northeastern Nigeria. In a study of the confederacy of Kwararafa, James Bertin Webster (1993)[37] presents a reconstruction of its history offering a rough chronological framework with relevance for the area under discussion. According to his findings, the founders of Kwararafa were Kutumbawa Hausa, the Jukun became only later associated with Kwararafa during the time of King Kenjo in about 1600. The first centre of Kwararafa was Santolo near Kano. Sarkin Yaji of Kano (1349-1385) conquered and destroyed Santolo, subsequently the headquarters of Kwararafa was moved to Tagara, which Webster identifies as a hill north of the Gongola-Hawal confluence. After Mai Ali Gajidemi of Bornu (ca. 1463-1495) had founded Ngazargamu as the new capital of Bornu west of Lake Chad, he conquered Tagara and dispersed the inhabitants taking 17,000 captives. A conflict during the time of Idris Katargambe, son of Mai Ali, was the last effort by traditionalists to wrest power from Muslims in Bornu, initiating a mass exodus from Bornu, and Yamta, leader of traditionalists in Bornu, founded Biu. Around 1520 a new dynasty regrouped Kwararafan and Ngazargamu refugees in the new capital Biepi, on the river Benue. The confederate kingdoms included Pindiga, Kamu, Misau, Kam, Kona, Warji, Kwana (Gwana) and Shira; Pindiga had Tera, Tangale, Bole, Tula and Wurkum sub-chiefs. The King of Pindiga attacked Kano, and Kwararafa was victorious in conflicts with Bornu in about 1600. The Jukun finally took over the Kwararafa monarchy in 1760-1790.

The impact of the Jukun on populations north of the Benue is evident in language contact phenomena (Storch 2003, 2011). Pindiga has a long history and was a centre of the Kwararafa confederacy north of the river Benue even before the confederacy became dominated by the Jukun. Webster (1993:4-7) suggests that Pindiga was founded around 1350 by Kutumbawa refugees who had fled from Santolo after it was conquered by Sarkin Yaji of Kano. While the majority of the refugees settled at Tagara to the north of the Gongola-Hawal confluence, some of them, under the leadership of Zangkara, founded Pindiga.[38] In the first half of the 16th century the Kutumbawa dynasty at Pindiga was overthrown in the wake of refugee migrations from Bornu caused by dynastic conflicts after the death of Mai Idris Katargambe (around 1518). It

[36] Je-Muri in Jukun language means ‘Muri people’, and together with the so-called Jan-Awei (children of Awei) they appear to have been Jukun speaking groups once having inhabited the Muri Mountains (personal communication by Anne Storch). Meek (1931:33), the ethnographer of the Jukun, writes: “To the west and south of Gwana there were, in the past, many large Jukun communities, most of which were destroyed by the Fulani. The Jukun were the real founders of Muri”.

[37] For a more easily accessible summary of his main findings see Afolayan 2005.

[38] Miller (1984:51), a disciple of Webster, puts the foundation of Pindiga between 1487-1560.

appears that Tangale, Tula and the Wurkun groups were brought into the Kwararafa confederacy under the umbrella of Pindiga:

> Pindiga expanded more than any of the other satellite chiefdoms having Tangale, Tera, Bolewa, Tula and Wurkum sub-chiefs (Webster 1993:7).

On the hills in the vicinity of current Pindiga, there are two abandoned sites called Binga (or Yelwa which is the Fulani name) and Katum/Kartu which are described by local traditions as predecessor settlements to Pindiga, with Binga being the oldest site (see also Dinslage & Storch 1996:57-58). To the best of our knowledge, no recent archaeological investigation has been carried out in the area to determine the age of Pindiga or the neighbouring sites. In 1969-1971, a Belgian research expedition carried out archaeological work on Kororofa (Biepi) and some other sites. Though Yelwa and Katum are mentioned on their map (Meulemeester & Nenquin 1972a:124), no information is provided on these sites. Pindiga is categorized as pre-Kororofa (Meulemeester & Nenquin 1972a:126), the timeframe provided for the foundation of Kororofa (Biepi) site is mid-15th to mid-17th century (Meulemeester 1975:211).[39]

It seems that the Wurkun peoples were not subservient to the Jukun kingdoms of the later phase of Kwararafa (Hamman 2007:25). In colonial records we find a note that;

> In pre-Fulani days they were probably subject to the Jukun of Pindiga, Kona, and Kororofa and it has been stated that a tax in salt used to be paid by them to the Jukun chiefs. Others however maintain that their relations with the Jukun whilst friendly were never subservient (Yolaprof K.5/SII, Gazetteer of Adamawa Province 1936:99-100).

What is stated here for the Wurkun would also apply to the Bikwin, as the Munga Leelau claim to have been a part of the Kwararafa confederation (Akila Apollos 1992 [ms.]). A connection of Wurkun migrations with the collapse of Kororofa (Biepi) town, the headquarters of the Kwararafa empire to the south of the Benue at the end of the 17th century, before Wukari became the centre, seems likely (Hamman 2007:7). Among the Pero, the Kode, the Kwonci and the Nyam, traditions of clans were recorded that explicitly claim to be of Kwararafa origin. This could mean either that a clan lays claim to an origin from the Jukun, or that it played some role in the configuration of the Kwararafa confederation. However, Kwararafa origins are claimed though for many groups in Central Nigeria and they cannot all be true. Functionally, Kwararafa plays a role similar to the Near East in constructed migration traditions.

4.6. Digression: Recurring motifs in traditions of origin

While scrutinising the historical traditions we came across three distinct recurrent motifs:

1) people with a terrestrial origin from caves or earth holes – in several cases these are also associated with the introduction of fire; a widespread motif in Africa.
2) people with a celestial origin from heaven whose ancestor left his imprint on a rock when he descended to earth.
3) people who had not known death and, after staging a mock burial, started dying.

The first motif, people whose origin was from a cave or hole, has already been discussed: we interpret it as a symbolic expression of autochthony, i.e. original/primeval settlers already living in the area before they were met by immigrating groups. This motif is common among the ethno-linguistic groups of the eastern Muri Mountains (the Cham, Dadiya) and the Bikwin groups (the Bambuka, Gomu, Munga Leelau, Leemak) and the Tala section of Kode. More difficult to interpret is another motif in several cases combined with this one: among the Bambuka, Gomu, Leemak and the Tala section of Kode, the cave dwellers are also purveyors of fire, teaching the incoming groups how to use fire and cook food. In the traditions of the Dadiya, the aboriginal peoples do not actually introduce fire, but at least they had and used fire

[39] On the outskirts of Pindiga there are heaps of slag, evidence of a once flourishing iron industry.

because when the newcomers approached the area they recognised that people were living there from the smoke of their fires. The groups moving in had no fire and up to that time cooked their food with the help of the sun. This is the reverse of the usual narrative, when the autochthonous foragers did not have fire and perhaps records the introduction of flintstones.

This brings about an awkward constellation, for usually one would not associate cave dwellers with essential elements of civilisation like domestic fire, and the groups moving in who claim to have come ultimately from Yemen or Mecca (meaning a centre of civilization) would admit that the autochthonous groups were culturally more developed. But probably this interpretation is mistaken and it is a matter of classificatory male and female genders couched in symbolic terms: the autochthonous groups may be regarded as female (fire → cooking → female), the incoming groups as male, both together generate a new whole unit and the use of fire in this configuration is a symbol of matrimony and an expression for the foundation of a whole and complete household. Following this line of interpretation, this motif may also allude to patrilineally organised invaders meeting upon groups with matrilineal traits. A special case, however, that is somehow contrary to this interpretation, are the traditions of the Gomu, where the autochthonous clans not only had fire in their cave but also a magic shining spear which was a powerful weapon. The spear has no female connotations and thus makes the application of male/female categories in this case problematic.

The second motif, people with a celestial origin from heaven whose ancestor left his imprint on a rock when he descended to earth, we recorded among the Gomu, Munga Leelau, Kwonci, Pero, Kulung and the Tala section of Kode. Similar sites and traditions are extremely common in Buddhist Asia. Sometimes these imprints on the rock consist of a footprint of an ancestor alone, sometimes of an ancestor and his horse or dog or of a jar or spear he brought with him. We have visited such a footprint on a mountain above Filiya: there are shallow holes, probably created from rainwater, which look remotely similar to a footprint.[40]

A somewhat modified version is found among the Bangwinji, where not a clan, but the deity Tangbe, who cares for the fertility of land and people, descended from heaven and left an imprint on the summit of a hill. Among the Kwa, a sacred pot being the property of the Kasso clan, came from heaven. The pot secures a good harvest and success in fishing. Obviously, here a natural phenomenon is usurped and locally interpreted by certain groups, bestowing qualities to them that transcend earthly limitations.

The third motif, peoples who did not know death, was recorded among the Pero, Piya, Kulung, Kode, Loo and Munga Leelau. There are clans among these groups of whom it is said that they had not known death; their members never died. However, they envied other groups for their funeral ceremonies, which allowed them to dance and drink beer. Thus, they staged a mock burial by killing a dog (among the Munga Leelau it is a squirrel), and conducted a burial ceremony. From this day on they started to die. A possible interpretation is that certain rituals were transferred from one group to another, at the same time conferring a certain amount of foolishness or backwardness on the groups in question because they gave up their everlasting lives for a ceremony of short duration and some jars of beer.

5. Conclusions

The historical processes outlined above exemplify the African Frontier model (Kopytoff 1987). The tension between a political centre (or metropole, in the original formulation), and its periphery generated a constant flux of population movements and the spawning of new polities, through pressure exercised by the centre on the societies at the periphery or by internal strife stimulating the exodus of individuals or groups to the periphery; processes that led to the formation of new or the re-configuration of existing polities and groups. Over the course of time, the

[40] We were told that in some cases the footprints have been destroyed by people who scratched off the rock in order to sell it as ‘medicine’.

most influential political centres in the area under discussion were the empire of Kanem/Borno, the enigmatic Kwararafa confederation or the various Fulani Emirates of the 19th century. The claim to an origin from a metropole, for example from Ngazargamu, is used by various groups and sub-groups as a device to gain political influence or improve their prestige, both within and outside of their ethnic group. In the affected societies, first-comers and late-comers negotiated their status in the societies with different outcomes, but usually, first-comers retained authority in the ritual domain, and late-comers acquired political influence. For instance, among the Cham, the autochthonous Jalaa, as the first known settlers in the area, have retained their ritual authority. The population dynamics developing in the area created new ethnic groups or reconfigured existing ones. A rare case in the area under discussion are the Kode, who evolved on the frontier between Chadic and Adamawa languages, comprising two completely different languages united under the umbrella of one ethnic unit; hence replicating the linguistic frontier within their own ethnic boundaries. We find a very similar case a little further east, among the Kaan (Libo), a sub-group of the Yungur cluster, where one part of the ethnic group speaks an Adamawa language and the other a Jarawan Bantu language (Kleinewillinghöfer 2019). Also similar are the two Chamba peoples, the Samba Leeko, who speak an Adamawa language, and their neighbours, with whom they share most cultural practices, the Sama Mum [Chamba Daka], who are Bantoid in affiliation.[41]

However, this is a highly local argument which might be more nuanced in the light of broader global comparisons. Elsewhere, e.g. in New Guinea and Australia, complex ethnic diversity has developed in the complete absence of 'metropoles'. In turn, the polities of the periphery served as political centres on a smaller level as well, generating their own frontier processes by triggering migrations of individuals, families or lineages and reproducing new groups; as such, the replication of these processes on different levels of scale may be considered as a kind of fractal history (Zeitlyn & Connell 2003).

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[41] For the ethnography of the Chamba see Fardon 1988 and Fardon 1990.

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