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The Wurkun Group: A Model Of Ethnic Integration In The Former Wurkun District Of Taraba State, 1914-1954

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Abstract: This study examines the diverse histories of origin, languages and cultural practices of the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups and factors that influence their ethnic integration in Taraba State. The study period is from the creation of the Wurkun District in 1914 to the Wurkun riot of 1954. The study used historical method which includes primary sources such as oral interviews, archival materials, Gazetteers, Government Blue Prints, Commissions and Panels Reports, Government Documents (Memoranda, Circulars, Acts, Edits), among others. While the secondary sources included published books, monographs, journal articles, chapters in books, abstracts, periodicals, papers presented at meetings, seminars, conferences and workshops, as well as articles in Magazines and Newspapers, Memoires, Autobiographies, Institutional records, Legal documents, Constitutions, Minutes of Meetings, District Notebooks, among others. Thus, documenting the historical accomplishments of the Wurkun group as a model of ethnic integration is crucial for preserving cultural heritage, promoting unity, and inspiring future generations in Taraba State, Nigeria. The findings of this study revealed that the Wurkun ethnic integration was influenced by several unifying factors amongst which are colonial administration, exogamy, exchange marriage, religious worldview and cultural practices. The study concluded that, the Wurkun commitment to peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange and inclusive governance serves as the basis for promoting unity and understanding among the duo ethnic groups in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Keywords: Wurkun, Ethnic, Integration, District, Taraba

Introduction

The Wurkun people's perceived homogeneity is indeed fascinating, given their history of ethnic integration on the western Muri Mountains. The aged long intergroup relationship between the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups on the western Muri Mountains is indeed a significant factor in shaping their perceived homogeneity.

Unknown to many Nigerians who held unto the homogenous group suppositions, the Wurkun group is actually a complex ensemble of diverse groups, each with their unique historical backgrounds, language classifications, and cultural practices. Their remarkable mutual relationships, fostered by centuries-long cohabitation in a shared geographical area, are truly exemplary.

In 1922, C. L. Temple observed that, the Wurkun who are located on the north bank opposite Lau, Muri Division of former Adamawa Province are described as "Wurkun" and spoken of as though they constitutes a single tribal group.[1] C. K. Meek also added his view on the composition of the Wurkun and narrated that, "during a tour of the Jukun speaking peoples in 1929, it appears that the Wurkun are not, as was previously supposed a distinct tribe, but a collection of peoples of totally different origin, some speaking a Bantu language and some a Sudanic".[2]

The diverse composition of the Wurkun also captured the attention of Mahmoud Hamman, who observed the Wurkun as a composite group. He stresses that, "they were composite groups of communities consisting of several small linguistic groups, which have been classified by Joseph Greenberg under the Central Branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic family.[3] Therefore, the Wurkun people's unique cultural practices, inclusive nature and harmonious coexistence make them a model of ethnic integration worthy of documentation.

Conceptual Analysis

Clarifying key concepts is essential in academic research to ensure precision and understanding. This is to ensure that readers understand the research's context and perspective, allowing for more accurate interpretation and application of the findings. Here are some concepts that may require clarification in the context of this study:

Wurkun

Clarifying the term Wurkun, Meek, states that the correct term is *Wur-kun*, that is "people of the hills," *wunu* or *wur* being a common Sudanic word for people and *kun* for hill.[4] Hamman also explains that, the Wurkun derived their common name of Wurkun from

[1] Temple, C. L. *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*. Lagos: The C.M.S. Bookshop, 1922. P. 514

[2] Meek, C. K. NAK/SNP17-5177/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

[3] Hamman, M. *The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869: The Impact of the Establishment of the Emirate of Muri*. Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 2007. P. 9

[4] NAK/SNP17/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province

the nature of their territory.[5] The term is said to be of Jukun origin and it means, "people of the hills," in contrast to the "*Wurbo*" which means, "people of the water.[6] The Wurkun comprised groups like the Kulung, made up of the villages of *Balasa*, *Bambur*, *Jikolo*, *Kirim*, *Kwanchi*, *Darofai*, and *Bamingun*. The Piya (*Walo*) occupied the villages of *Angulle*, *Pitiko*, *Bashama*, *Ambandingo*, *Wiam* and *Angapra*.[7]

Ezra, expressed that "only the Kulung (*Bakulung*) and Piya (*Walo*) are today regarded as Wurkun." He further stresses that, "dispassionately speaking, there is nothing wrong if the term Wurkun stands the synonym of Kulung and Piya, because the purpose of the name of an ethnic group is usually for identification and unity.[8] Pitiko, added that the term "Wurkun" is used for political unity and administrative convenience to refer to people on the hill of *Ambandi* (Piya) and Kulung extraction.[9]

Adelberger and Ulrich, recognises the Wurkun and uphold that, the Kulung are often called Wurkum or Wurkun. Added to that, Tanko says the term "Wurkun" is not derived from the groups that formed the Wurkun language rather a Jukun terminology referring to the settler on the hill.[10]

In the context of this study, Wurkun refers to the Kulung and Piya ethnic group who cohabits on the Western Muri Mountain and foster unity and cooperation in the present day Karim-Lamido Local Government Area of Taraba State.

Ethnic Integration

Ethnic integration refers to the process of different ethnic groups coming together, sharing cultural practices and fostering unity.[11] According to Lobera et al., the intensification of ethnic conflicts across the world in recent years has exacerbated the difficulty of solving this problem and has triggered new thinking about ethnic integration and the harmonization of ethnic relations.[12]

Therefore, ethnic integration in the context of this study, is not the same as ethnic assimilation or the elimination of differences between diverse ethnic groups, rather it refers to the process of bringing together people from different ethnic background into a cohesive and harmonious community, promoting mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation.

The Ethnic Composition and Origins of the Wurkun

A Gazetteer of Adamawa Province, 1936 mentioned that, "the group known under the generic term of Wurkun are the most numerous after the Mumuye and include a variety of people, the chief of whom are the Piya and Kulung.[13] The Piya is reputed to have migrated from *Gbandum* hills in what was then Tangale-Waja District at the time when Yakubu of Bauchi was engaged in slave raiding.

To escape capture, the people moved and scattered over the whole of the north western part of the District extending from *Darofai* to *Bachama*.[14] They are now closely allied to the Kulung with whom they have intermarried. The Kulung occupy the towns of *Balassa*, *Bambur* and *Kirim*. They speak a language of Bantu type.[15] However, the distinctive origins of the Kulung and Piya of the Wurkun group is discussed below:

(a) The Kulung

The Kulung as they are sometimes called, like any other ethnic group has its own history of origin. The Kulung, live mainly in the Southwest Muri mountains in Karim-Lamido Local Government Area of Taraba State. Their main neighbours to the north are the Piya, to the east the *Kwanchi*, to the west the *Nyam* and the *Jarawa-Ligri*.

In the relevant literature, the Kulung are often called Wurkun. The name was derived from the Jukun language meaning "people of the hills."[16] According to Adelberger and Kleinewillinghofer, Wurkun is a generic term applied to the different peoples inhabiting the area of the old Wurkun District such as Kulung, Piya, Kwanchi and others.[17]

The Kulung had close interactions with the Chadic speaking Piya in the course of their history and they share common cultural traits. The Kulung are subdivided into the main regional sections namely, *Bambur*, *Balassa* and *Bamingun*. Each of these section again consist of various patrilineal clans and lineages.[18]

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[5] Hamman, M. *The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869*…P.9
[6] Hamman, M. *The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869*…P.9
[7] Hamman, M. *The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869*…P.9-10
[8] Haruna Ezra, *The Wurkun and their Culture*. Jalingo: Matty Press, 2013. P.11
[9] Pitiko, Mahmud. In Tanko, M. "The Economic History of Wurkuns in Karim-Lamido LGA of Taraba State in the 20th Century." Gombe Journal of Historical Studies, Vol. 1. (1), June, 2021. P.362
[10] Tanko, M. "The Economic History of Wurkun in Karim-Lamido LGA of Taraba State in the 20th Century." Gombe Journal of Historical Studies, Vol. 1. (1), June, 2021. P.361
[11] Plog, F. and Bates, D. G. *Cultural Anthropology Second Edition*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc., 1980. P.16
[12] Lobera, et al. 2021
[13] Yola Prof/ K5/SII/1936/Gazetteer of Adamawa Province. P.164
[14] Yola Prof/ K5/SII/1936/Gazetteer of Adamawa Province. P.164
[15] Yola Prof/ K5/SII/1936/Gazetteer of Adamawa Province. P.164
[16] Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. "A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride". P.10
[17] Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. "A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride". P.10
[18] Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. "A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride". P.10

In their tradition of origin, the Kulung claim to have historical connections with the Jukun of Gwana on the north side of the Muri mountains and the Jukun of Kona on the South bank of the river Benue.[19] According to McBride, at about 16th centuries it was related that a man named "*Mbur*" left his home in the Jukun town of Kona to look for a new place to live. Probably as a result of slave raids and community disputes among his kinsmen.[20]

This journey took *Mbur* north across the Benue river and it wide valley to the rocky ridges of the rim northern edge. After climbing the hill a good place was discovered, it had adequate place for buildings, availability of water and a fortress for protection against enemies.[21]

Having seen that, *Mbur* took the decision to move his family from Kona to this new world. *Mbur* relocated with three young men which were recounted as his children or his friends or his relations. It was quite certain the name of the hill and town was derived from his name "*Ba*" and "*Mbur*," meaning "place of *Mbur*."[22]

McBride added that, there is no doubt as the founder, he automatically became the leader of the group. Thereafter, other people started coming to settle there, such as two brothers, *Sanga* and *Nyilo* came and settled in the west. Similarly, some riverine people from far up the Benue River came and occupied the higher part of the mountain.[23] Other people from Kona built their homes on *Nzhikwano* ridges some distance from Balassa and still on the mountain farther east.

Two other groups came from Pero and settled on the north end of *Balassa*. Tradition has it that conflict soon arose between the first comers but there also existed inter marriages. No date has been given to the accurate report as to who came first, but anyone that came first might have come around c.1750 according to Mcbride.[24]

A very old blind man, living high on Balassa Mountain gave another version of the Kulung tradition of origin. His name is *Gerkwa* of the *Pigulun* clan.[25] According to *Gerkwa*, the Kulung people are not either related to the Jukun or the Peros, but have come from a place far up the Benue River, beyond Numan. They had been driven out by wars and conflicts and had come down the Benue and settled on the river bank at the place called *Sobalingu*, opposite Lau. They had planted the silk-cotton trees which can still be seen there presently.[26] Later they moved again, coming up to the hills, two of their clans, the *Piu* and the *Piugulum* settled on the top of Balassa Mountain and a third clan, the *Pira*, built on the Kwanchi hill.[27] He explained that, the Kulung language was indigenous to their fathers when the Jukun and Peros came they taught it to them.[28]

It can be deduced that, the east to west migration of the Kulung must have accounted for the linguistic relationship between the Kulung and the ethnic groups of *Tambo*, *Mundong*, *Mbula*, *Bile*, and *Bare* in Song, Girei, Numan, and Demsa Local Government Area of present Adamawa State. As it is presently, there is great similarities in the languages spoken by the Kulung and that of *Mbula* and *Tambo* people of Demsa and Song Local Government of Adamawa State.

(b) The Piya

According to Brierly, at about c. 1750, a series of migrations appears to have taken place from *Gwandum-Pero-Filiya* area of what was then Gombe Division, probably to escape slave raiders and the fierce Tangale ethnic group.[29] These immigrants were, and are Piya speaking.[30] Meek, noted that, the Piya are totally different linguistic group, a branch of the *Pero* or *Pibero*.[31] They are called Piya by the Kulung, the called themselves "*Walo*," a name which probably means "the men," as *Walo* in a number of languages (such as among the *Namshi* of Cameroun).[32]

The Piya constitute an exogamous society and were socially organized in patrilineal clans' basis. Thus at Angulle there are the following clans or kindred, *Anyeragba*, *Angudeilu*, *Baginje*, *Andami*, *Pigenue*, *Pugaeri*, and *Kpaya*.[33] Meek, added that these clans are nowadays not wholly localized, for there are groups of *Anyeragba* at *Kirim*, *Nyam*, *Dongoro*, and *Dari*. even in the olden days' clan organization was doubtless in a constant state of flux, but the safety brought by the British Administration has automatically led to wholesome disruption of clan unity.[34]

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[19] Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. "A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride". P.10
[20] Mcbride, Ira E. *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Penysylvania: USA, 1972. P.20
[21] Mcbride, Ira E. *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.20
[22] Mcbride, Ira E. *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.20
[23] Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.20
[24] Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.5-10
[25] Gerkwa, in Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.10
[26] Gerkwa, in Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.10
[27] Gerkwa, in Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.10
[28] Gerkwa, in Mcbride, Ira E., *Stories of Long Ago: Kulung History*. Pennnysylvania: USA, 1972. P.10
[29] NAK/SNP NO.2610/32/1954/Brierly Report on Wurkun District
[30] NAK/SNP NO.2610/32/1954/Brierly Report on Wurkun District
[31] NAK/SNP 17/1934/C.K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.
[32] NAK/SNP 17/1934/C.K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.
[33] NAK/SNP 17/1934/C.K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.
[34] NAK/SNP 17/1934/C.K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

In divergence to Meek's supposition, the clan plays vital role in kinship and social organization in Piya society, by serving as the primary social unit that provides emotional support and protection. Also, the clan serves as the first community shaping individual identity and belonging. In addition, it serves as the initial authority, teaching social norms, values and traditions.

The Piya settled on the hills of *Bashama, Angulle, Pitiko, Kwanchi* and mixed at *Balassa, Kirim,* and later *Darofai* with the *Kulung* inhabitants with whom they appear to have friendly relations throughout, and the customs of both groups are now much the same.[35] The Piya and Kulung lived together to the degree that their culture shows such functional relationship, its different parts interlocking with and supporting the others, it is said to be integrated.[36]

George, opined that, a society cannot survive without such a minimum integration made possible through toleration based on the principles of unity in diversity or one in many.[37] In the villages were the Piya and Kulung were mixed they understood each other's language, elsewhere not, except through Hausa.[38]

More so where the Kulung and Piya are mixed, it does not means perfect integration without any conflict or deviance, but the basic of the normative pattern for the whole interaction system which will be such that interacting individuals and subgroups know what to expect from each other, and approves of one another goals.[39]

Meek, states that, "the group comprising the villages of *Angulle, Bangibe, Pitiko,* and *Bashama,* speaks a totally different languages of the Sudanic type." It is a dialect of Pero and closely allied to Kushi and should be included in the Adamawa group of the Central Sudanic Division.[40] The people of this group are called the "Piya" by the Kulung, but they called themselves "*Walo*." For practical purpose they can be regarded as belong to the Pero ethnic group located mainly across the border in Bauchi Province (Present Bauchi and Gombe States).[41]

Also, Gray Haig mentioned that, confusion arises from the application of the name Wurkum or Wurkun to the Piya and Pero as well as the Kulung.[42] Despite distinct origins and language classifications, the Kulung and Piya have achieved significant ethnic integration.

Language Comparison of the Kulung and Piya

(a) The Kulung Language

Egonu, described language as an arbitrary code of symbols by which people communicate with each other, interact and cooperate. He also added that, Language is such an essential part of man that is used to identify individuals and groups.[43] Therefore, language is a vital part of the Kulung identity, it reflects their history and traditions. The people of the towns of *Balasa, Bambur, Jikono, Kirim, Kwanchi, Darofai,* and *Bamingun,* are known as the Kulung (*Bakulung*) and speaks a classifying language of Bantu type.[44]

It is practically the same language that is spoken by the *Jarawa* further east, and bears a close affinity to the language of the *Mbula, Bare,* and *Bille* in Numan Division of Adamawa State. Also, the Kulung (*Bakulung*) language interrelated to the *Gubawa, Bobar, Bankalawa* and *Bomberawa* of former Bauchi Province (present-day, Bauchi State).[45] In addition, the Kulung (*Bakulung*) language has similarity to *Nagumi* and *Nbua* who lives across the Adamawa border in French Cameroun. Thus, in the opinion of Meek, for practical purpose the Kulung (*Bakulung*) can be described as *Jarawa*.[46]

Similarly, Roger Blench, classified the Kulung language as the Jarawan Bantu branch, a sub-group of the Benue-Congo language family. The peoples own name for their language is '*Kukulun'*, while their own name for themselves is '*Bakulung'* and *Wurkun-Bambur* is the location based name for the language.[47] Also, the language has approximate speakers of 15,000 and Kulung is currently being passed to the next generation and being learned by neighbouring peoples in contact with the Kulung.[48]

Blench is a renowned Linguist and Anthropologist specializing in African languages and cultures, his classification as mentioned above provides valuable insight into the Kulung language's relationships and origin. The Kulung language features unique grammatical, distinctive vocabularies and phonological characteristics that is different from that of their neighbours.

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[35] NAK/SNP NO.2610/32/1954/Brierly Report on Wurkun District

[36] Plog, F. and Bates, D. G. *Cultural Anthropology*…P.16

[37] George, P. *Society in Being: Metaphysical Foundation of Sociology*. Bangalore: Asian Trading Company, 2003. P.62

[38] NAK/SNP NO.2610/32/1954/Brierly Report on Wurkun District

[39] George, P. *Society in Being: Metaphysical Foundation of Sociology*. Bangalore…P.62

[40] Meek, C. K. *Northern Tribes of Nigeria. Vol. 2*. P.138

[41] Meek, C. K. NAK/SNP17/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

[42] Haig Gray, F. E. The Nigerian Field, Vol. 55-57…P.41

[43] Egonu, I. T. K. "Indigenous and Foreign Languages in Africa: Their Role in African Development." In Egonu, I. T. K. ed. *Readings in African Humanities: African Perspective in World Culture*. Owerri- Nigeria: Vivians and Vivians Foundation Publishers, 1988. P. 59

[44] Meek, C. K. NAK/SNP17/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

[45] Meek, C. K. NAK/SNP17/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

[46] Meek, C. K. NAK/SNP17/1934/Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.

[47] Blench, R. An Atlas of Nigerian Languages. Cambridge: Kay Williamson Foundation, 2011. P.54

[48] Blench, R. An Atlas of Nigerian Languages. Cambridge: Kay Williamson Foundation, 2011. P.54

(b) The Piya Language

The point of historical linguistics lies not so much in finding a common predialectical language as in appreciating the overall linguistic spread of different, apparently, unrelated languages.[49] A language is seldom enclosed within a clearly defined space, but most commonly overflows its own area by making relationships with other languages of varying degrees of kinship, such relationships being sometimes imperceptible at first.[50]

The important underlying problem is obviously that of population movements. A common identity language does not necessarily go together with group identity. But, it does give relevant information about an essential, and indeed the only real unity, like, the basic cultural unity of people united by a common language even sometimes with very different origins and political systems.[51] It is on the above mentioned basis that, this segment of the study determines to analyse the Piya (*Walo*) language.

According to Blench, the Piya belongs to *Piya-Kwonchi*-Cluster of the West-Chadic sub-branch of Bole group of languages. The alternate spelling of the head name is "*Pia*," while the location based name of the language is Wurkun.[52] The dialect is associated with the Pero spoken around three main villages of *Gwandum*, *Gundale*, and *Filiya* in Shongom Local Government Area of Gombe State. [53] Storch Anne, in *Secret Manipulations: Language and Context in Africa*, also agreed that, Piya is a Chadic Language of Afro-asiatic Phylum.[54]

Adelberger, has done fieldwork in the Muri Mountains and has provided some information regarding the group. He observed that, "the Wurkun who lived in the western region of the mountains, are today composed of the Piya."[55]

The comparative wordlist of the Kulung and Piya language is a proof of their distinctive origins as shown below:

Table 1. Comparative Wordlists of the Kulung and Piya Languages

S/N	English	Kulung (*Bakulung*)	Piya (*Walo*)
1	Head	*muru*	*zwoi*
2	Hair	*nyo*	*sot*
3	Eye	*musu*	*oro*
4	Ear	*kiri*	*musu*
5	Nose	*lulu*	*wikin*
6	Tongue	*lasa*	*dagh*
7	Neck	*myel*	*gbong*
8	Tooth	*minu*	*tudo*
9	Breast (woman)	*kyubra*	*wuli*
10	Belly	*bum*	*funggul*
11	Back	*nyanzun*	*yevi*
12	Arm	*kabi*	*tsira*
13	Hand	*bugh*	*tsira*
14	Finger	*nyali bugh*	*antalra*
15	Leg	*zong*	*so*
16	Knee	*kulu* or *kulngu*	*kulunn*
17	Foot	*zong*	*yazo*
18	Man	*bamburum*	*mia*
19	Woman	*bamu* or *mun ma*	*pomon*
20	Father	*da* or *tiri*	*da*
21	Mother	*na* or *ngye*	*yayi*
22	Chief	*talla*	*kup*
23	Sun	*missa*	*palang*
24	God	*yamba*	*yamba*
25	Moon	*zunga* (*zuga*)	*tere* or *lere*
26	Day	*missa*	*kabalang*
27	Night	*dugu*	*pidi*
28	Morning	*bari*	*kazeget*

[49] Ki-Zerbo, General History of Africa…P.104
[50] Ki-Zerbo, General History of Africa…P.104
[51] Ki-Zerbo, General History of Africa…P.104
[52] Blench, R. An Atlas of Nigerian Languages. Cambridge: Kay Williamson Foundation, 2011. P.74
[53] Blench, Roger. An Atlas of Nigerian Languages. Cambridge: Kay Williamson Foundation, 2011. P.74
[54] Storch, Anne. Secret Manipulations: Language and Context in Africa. London: Oxford University Press, 2011, P. 219
[55] Adelberger, Jorg. In African Arts, Vol. 35…P.61

29	Rain	*mbulo*	*am*
30	Blood	*kila*	*tom*
31	Salt	*mugha*	*choang*
32	Stone	*tali*	*pandi*
33	Hill	*dere ban*	*kudoro*
34	River	*salla*	*kuziruk*
35	Road	*njere*	*koko*
36	House	*nda*	*nina*
37	Spear	*kwongo*	*barang*
38	Monkey	*nyo*	*kyal*
39	Goat	*mbilin*	*biya*
40	Bird	*munnyeli*	*dio*
41	Snake	*yogho*	*kuret*
42	Tree	*ngun*	*puro*
43	Maize	*mikin*	*kyakuru*
44	Oil	*murugh*	*moru*

Source: 1. NAK/SNP17/21577/1934/C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes of Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.[56]
2. Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride.[57]
3. Words derived from researcher's field work.

Factors that contributed to the Kulung and Piya Ethnic Integration

Toyin Falola affirm that, in every group there were many institutions which brought the people closer to one another.[58] Likewise, the Wurkun ethnic integration was influenced by several unifying factors amongst which are colonial administration, exogamy, exchange marriage, religious worldview and cultural practices, among others. The key factors that played vital role in the Wurkun ethnic integration were studied as follows:

(a) Colonial Administration

On the advent of colonial administration in 1900 in the former Muri Division, the term "Wurkun" was not the recognized ethnic identity of any ethnic group in the area north of the River Benue, or the generic ethnic identity of any particular group in the vicinity. The application of the term was not exclusive to the hill dwellers such as the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups, because, the term can equally fit other hill inhabitants in the same area such as, the Loh, Panya, Gwomu, and Bambuka as well. However, the application of the term to refer to the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups may have taken effect after the creation of the Wurkun District by the Colonial Administration.

In 1914, Jalingo-Habe was combined with the former District of Balassa, Kakalla (Bashama), and Gwomu to form the Wurkun District which for administrative convenience remained under the District Headship of Jauro Bauro (Muhammadu Tukur) who in 1916 was given the title of Ubandoma.[59] Jauro Bauro continued as District Head until 1953, when he succeeded Muhammadu Mafindi as Emir of Muri.

The Wurkun District lies on the north bank of the Benue opposite Lau and is bounded on its south by the River Benue, on its west by the sparsely inhabited and arid Muri District, on its north by Bauchi and Gombe Divisions. It measures approximately 40 miles from east to west by 30 miles from south to north [60] The District is divided geographically into four main parallel belts which from south to north include, the Benue Flood Plain, the Savannah Plain, the Hills and the Northern Plain.[61]

In the period under study, the population of the Wurkun District was approximately 41,000. The census gave a figure of 41, 585 as the total population while the 1953-54 Tax count totaled 40,502.[62] The hills are about 8 to 12 miles wide from south to north and are rocky and rugged in nature, reaching about 3,000 feet at their highest. They consist of a southern and a northern range which are joined together in the centre. The north-west spur has the Wurkun villages.[63] The hills provided a geographic proximity which gave rise to shared land, resources and long-standing presence with multi-century settlements for cohabitation of the various clans of the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups.

[56] NAK/SNP17/21577/1934/C.K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province. P.32
[57] Adel Berger, J. and Kleinewillinghofer, U. A Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Missionary Ira McBride. P.18
[58] Falola, T. et al. History of Nigeria I: Nigeria Before 1800AD…P.125
[59] NAK/SNP No. 2610/1954/T. G. Brierly Report on Wurkun District. P.3
[60] NAK/SNP No. 2610/1954/T. G. Brierly Report on Wurkun District. P.3
[61] NAK/SNP No. 2610/1954/T. G. Brierly Report on Wurkun District. P.3
[62] NAK/SNP No. 2610/1954/T. G. Brierly Report on Wurkun District. P.2
[63] NAK/SNP No. 2610/1954/T. G. Brierly Report on Wurkun District. P.3

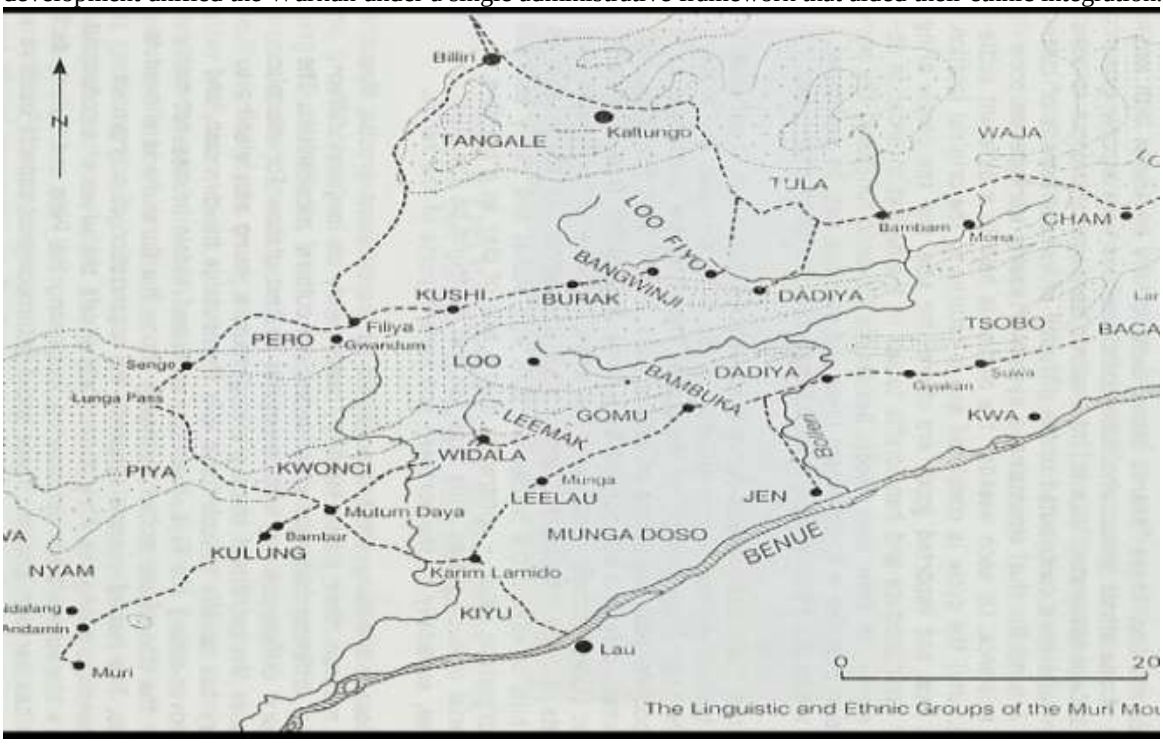
On the 13th July, 1954 at Karim-Lamido, the office of the District Head of Wurkun had becomes vacant when the former District Head, a Fulani, took up the position of Emir of Muri.[64] The son to the former District Head was appointed as the successor to his post. This led to opposition from various parts of the population, an objection to the then Resident was put forward but rejected.[65] Ira McBride recounted the Karim-Lamido incident thus;

> "On 13th July, 1954 several hundreds of people, (about 300 according to report by the administration, about 600 according to Karl Kuglin), met with the District Officer W. D. Wilson at Karim-Lamido. When he tried to arrest the leaders, the situation got out of control and police officers fired three shots into the crowd, killing one man and injured either one or two others. The administration blamed the mission for having incited a riot by spreading insurgent ideas and subsequently the Kuglins had to leave the country."[66]

On 3rd September, 1954 McBride as superintendent was summoned by the administration and told that the mission had to take the blame for the riot at Karim-Lamido and Kuglin had to leave. In defense, McBride pointed out that,

> "the people resentment against the Fulani control was boiling 30 years ago, that the corruption and graft has grown only worse and that in recent years the government had continued to send pamphlets of literature on the Atlantic Charter, Tour Freedom, free elections, self-government, to be distributed to the mission schools and that all this enlightenment literature only left the people more dissatisfied".[67]

With the advent of Colonial Administration there were initial developments which inspired the expectations among the Kulung that the Fulani hegemony was about to be terminated.[68] Therefore, the Karim-Lamido incident can be said to be "the last straw that broke the camel's back", hence, inspired the change of leadership of the Wurkun District from the Fulani aristocracy to the Wurkun. This development unified the Wurkun under a single administrative framework that aided their ethnic integration.



Source: Adelberger, Jorg. "Structuring Diversity: Linguistic, History and Cultural Aspects of the Societies of the Muri Mountains, Northeastern Nigeria". Paper Presented to the African Studies Association 36th Annual Meeting 1993

Fig. 1. Map of the Muri Mountain Showing the Kulung and Piya Ethnic Groups

(b) Exogamy System

[64] D. O. Muri Division, W. D. Wilson, Public Record Office, CO 554/1235
[65] D. O. Muri Division, W. D. Wilson, Public Record Office, CO 554/1235
[66] Jorg Adelberger and Ulrich Kleinewillinghofer. The Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Ira Mcbride…P.6
[67] Letter by Karl Kuglin, 14th October, 1954
[68] Jorg Adelberger and Ulrich Kleinewillinghofer. The Kulung Vocabulary Compiled by Ira Mcbride…P.6

The Kulung and Piya people were exogamous in nature and socially organized based on clan system. Meek, observed that, the Kulung village consists of a number of local groups, each of which is an exogamous unit, has its own headman, and its own religious cult. Each local group of a village may be regarded as a small clan.[69]

Thus, the Kulung consists of the following clans, *Bata-bulo*, *Kakalabe*, *Kangobo*, *Waram*, *Kadoi*, *Kasagha*, *Kagong*, *Bata-Kiri*, *Kabagha*, *Babangla*, *Bang-Konong*, and *Bangei*.[70] While, the Piya (*Walo*) are also organized in small patrilineal exogamous clans or kindred's namely, *Anyeragha*, *Angudelu*, *Baginje*, *Andami*, *Pigenue*, *Pugaeri*, and *Kpaye*.[71]

The Kulung and Piya constitute an exogamous society, which marriage within one's own descent group was strictly prohibited. For instance, members of the same clan composed of males and females who traced their genealogies through specified link to a common ancestor are prohibited to marry each other. The exogamy system which is integral among the Kulung and Piya people constitute a unifying culture in the Wurkun ethnic integration.

Falola et al, confirmed that, the custom which forbade a man from marrying within his lineage or people related to him by previous marriage ties created a complex inter-locking web of relationships in many parts of Nigeria and thus contributed to inter-group relations.[72] The custom contributed tremendously over the centuries to the Wurkun ethnic integration by creating windows for intergroup marriages and such marriages created relatives in various communities of the Kulung and Piya people.

(c) Exchange Marriage

Dahang, mentioned that, between the various clans of Kulung and Piya marriage contracts were aligned. Men from *Bambur*, were married to ladies from *Balasa*, likewise *Banyam* men married ladies from *Bamingun*, and vice versa. These intermarriages between families or clans increased mutual friendship and unity amongst the clans and sub-clans.[73]

Meek advanced that, the Kulung and Piya formerly practiced marriage by exchange, with the usual rule that the husband with the fewer children could claim one or more of his sister's children.[74] One of the many advantage of the exchange system was that in a childless marriage the husband would have someone to look after him in his old age, especially. the son of his married sister (female cousin).[75]

(d) Religious Worldview

The Wurkun ethnic integration was also promoted by their religious beliefs. The belief systems and world outlook of the peoples of the area in the period before the jihad were governed by their conception of what may be termed as the circle of nature.[76] This involved the relationship between man and the elements, particularly the earth on the one hand, and on the other, the relationship between these elements and celestial phenomena.[77]

The earth provided material life in combination with the other elements, like water and air whose behaviour was more uncertain and which were more remotely controlled by other forces of nature. These forces to which man had no direct access were supposed to be manifested in celestial bodies like the sun, the moon and the stars.[78]

The conception of the circle of nature gave rise to a multitude of intermediary agencies whose purpose was to intercede between man and nature. Thus, there developed many cults and deities ranging from private to communal ones, serving different purposes.[79] Apart from major cults, which were directly devoted to the sky and earth gods, there were also other cults which played intermediary roles between society and the high gods. The most important of them were those connected with ancestor worship.[80]

According to Shishima, ancestors are departed relations who are no longer visible on earth because they have become spirits. Professor Isa Adamu who hailed from the Kulung extraction of the Wurkun explicates that, the departed ancestors are regarded as pleny potentiaries, their families sometimes build shrines for them and offer sacrifices when necessary.[81] Some of them may have been priests, or kings who after their departure, are deified.[82] Awolalu and Dopamu, says that, "belief in the ancestors is an element

[69] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province. P.4
[70] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province. P.4
[71] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province.P.20
[72] Falola, T. et al. History of Nigeria I: Nigeria Before 1800AD…P.126
[73] Dahang, Samson L. A Socio-Economic and Political History of Kulung People, 1800-1900…P.25…P.25
[74] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province. P.21
[75] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province. P.21
[76] Hamman, M. The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869…P.16
[77] Hamman, M. The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869…P.16
[78] Hamman, M. The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869…P.16
[79] Hamman, M. The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869…P.16
[80] Hamman, M. The Middle Benue Region and the Sokoto Jihad 1812 – 1869…P.16
[81] Prof. Isa Adamu. Oral Interview, 28th April, 2025, Taraba State University, Jalingo
[82] Shishima, S. D. African Religion: A Bird's Eye View. Makurdi: Obeta Continental Press Nigeria, P.37

in the religion of west African peoples. Everywhere, we find ancestral cults, these ancestors are venerated and they receive regular offerings from their offspring".[83]

The *Basali* cult, is the main cult for the general magico-religious purposes among the Kulung. Each clan or ward has its own, a circle of stones with grass hut in the centre. The cult plays an important part in the social life of the Kulung people, being a drinking club for all grown-up males, and the instrument by which social offences are publicly rebuked.[84] The rites of *Basali* held annually in July or August, are a commemoration or pacification of the death.

After making the ritual offering all present eat and dance and then pay a visit to each household of the clan, dancing and receiving gifts of pounded beans and beer. Every hamlet which has lost one of its senior members during the year carries out its own *Basali* rites, with members of the other hamlets attending.[85] Though, each hamlet has its own *Basali* cult, there is one hamlet (*Babangla*) whose chief is the president of all the *Basali* cults.[86]

Professor Isa Adamu clarified further that, the Basali cult festival is being celebrated by the Piya as well as the surrounding villages. It is indeed regarded as a unifying cult among the Wurkun.[87] The Piya (*Walo*) had a cult called "*Kinda Ma*", It is mainly a cult of ancestors, and rites are carried out before sowing and harvesting.[88] However, the Kulung and Piya are now predominantly adherents of Christianity and Islam.

Conclusion

The Wurkun people of Taraba State, Nigeria, are often misunderstood as a homogenous ethnic group, but they are a diverse ensemble of people with distinct histories of origin and languages. The term "Wurkun" is a Jukun-Kona terminology meaning "people of the hills." The factors that contributes to the Wurkun ethnic integration include, Colonial Administration which unified the ethnic groups under a single administrative framework, as well as exchange marriage which kindled intermarriage between the Kulung and Piya ethnic groups and also promoted social cohesion. Traditional religious beliefs and cultural practices likewise endowed the Wurkun with shared spiritual and cultural heritage. The Wurkun commitment to peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange and inclusive governance serves as a model for promoting unity and understanding among diverse ethnic groups in Taraba State, Nigeria.

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[86] NAK/SNP17/21577/ C. K. Meek, Ethnographical Notes on Wurkun District, Adamawa Province…P.9

[87] Prof. Isa Adamu. Oral Interview, 28th April, 2025, TSU Jalingo

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