

**Historicising Belonging: Autochthony, Internal Migration and Identity Formation in the Jos Plateau Area of Nigeria<sup>1</sup>**

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*Abstract*

This article, is the first from a study that, examines the role of identity in contentious inter-group relations among the different religious and cultural groups that inhabit the Jos Plateau area of Nigeria. Violent conflicts, albeit intermittently, have occurred in the Jos Plateau area since 2001.<sup>2</sup> The intermittent conflicts, in the area, have been referred to as the Jos crisis. The Jos crisis has attracted the attention of scholars of conflict management and peace studies who, in their search for a peaceful resolution of the crisis, have traced the causes of hostilities by residents to the fierce deployment of identity along ethnic and religious inclinations among other immediate and remote factors.<sup>3</sup> Although these scholars have emphasised the role of identity in their analysis of the history of inter-group hostilities in the Jos Plateau area, they have however, not examined the process through which the local identities, that were mobilised during the violent confrontations that occurred, were created. To fill this gap, this and subsequent articles will contribute to the search for enduring peace in the Jos Plateau area by historicising the process of local identity formation so as to be able to decipher the particularities in the constitutive character and components of belonging that has made it fodder for conflictual inter-group relations in the area.

**Key Words:** Belonging, Migration, Culture, Identity, Conflict and Jos-Plateau.

**Introduction**

There are about 52 different cultural groups that are indigenous to the Jos Plateau area of Nigeria and its surrounding low lands.<sup>4</sup> The Jos Plateau is a highland that is about 1,500 to 3000

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Higazi "Jos Crisis: A Recurrent Nigerian Tragedy," *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung*, (A Discussion Paper, No. 2 January, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> These include Kingsley L. Madueke "From Neighbours to Deadly Enemies: Excavating Landscapes of Territoriality and Ethnic Violence in Jos, Nigeria" *Journal of African Contemporary Studies* (2017), Jana Krause "Non-violence and Civilian Agency in Communal War: Evidence from Jos, Nigeria" *African Affairs*, vol. 116: 463 (2017), Gbemisola Animasawun "Managing Fault Lines in Nigeria's Protracted Conflicts: The Inevitability of Multi-Track Diplomacy in the Jos Crisis" *Ibadan Journal of Social Sciences* vol. 12: 1, (2014), Henry Gyang Mang "Land and Labour Migrations in Central and Southern Plateau: Implications for Conflicts' Identity Construction" in Toyin Falola, Roy Doron and Opkpeh. O. Okpeh (eds) *Warfare Ethnicity and National Identity Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013), Shedrack Gaya Best (ed) *Causes and Effects of Conflict in the Southern Zone of Plateau State, Nigeria*, (Jos: Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, University of Jos, 2008), Shedrack Gaya Best *Conflict and Peace Building in Plateau State, Nigeria*, (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2007), Umar Habila Dadiem Danfulani and Sati Umaru Fwatschak "Briefing: The September 2001 Events in Jos, Nigeria" *African Affairs* No. 101 (2002), among others.

<sup>4</sup> John Garah Nengel "Politics and Cultures of Plateau State" in Monday Yakiban Mangvwat and Chris M. A. Kwaja *Centenary History of Plateau State 1914-2014* (Jos: Plateau State Government, 2015), 64-65, Roger Blench et al (eds) *Advances in Minority*

meters higher than the surrounding plains in north-central Nigeria.<sup>5</sup> The highland area stretches approximately 8,600 kilometres with longitude 8°22'-9°30'E and latitude 8°50'-10°10'N and is interspersed with granite hills, narrow gorges, valleys and plains.<sup>6</sup> The Jos Plateau high land is surrounded by extensive plain lands that are inhabited by equally heterogeneous cultural groups of people that have a long history of interaction with each other and with members of the ethnic groups that dwell on the highland.<sup>7</sup> Some members of the different ethnic groups that inhabit the Jos Plateau area claim to be autochthonous hence, are considered to be aboriginal while members of other cultural groups came into the area as part of different waves of migration into the area that took place over time.<sup>8</sup> While some of these migrations occurred many centuries ago others took place within the last century.<sup>9</sup> These waves of migration can be categorised into the ancient period, the late pre-colonial period and the colonial and post-colonial periods of migration into the Jos Plateau area.<sup>10</sup> The continuous entry of migrants into the Jos Plateau area increased the number of ethnic groups in the area.

We have already mentioned that the continuous migration of people into the Jos plateau area created a heterogeneous ethnic population with an attendant multi-cultural landscape. Hence, the extant cultural diversity beautified the hilly landscape of the Jos Plateau and its surrounding low land areas. The beautiful scenery was enhanced by peaceful interactions between the members of different groups who engaged in peaceful economic and cultural exchanges.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the scenario presented here is of multiple ethnic groups, peacefully interacting within the hills, valleys and surrounding lowland areas of the Jos Plateau area.

However, despite the occurrence of friendly relations between members of the different cultural affinities in the study area there were occasions that sometimes generated tensions. These tensions were either resolved amicably, via the use of mutually accepted cultural methods

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*Language Research in Nigeria*, vol. I, Rudiger Koppe Verlag, Cologne, 2012 and NBT Library Jos: Compilation of Indigenous Languages in Plateau State, Nigeria. The list is attached at the end of the article as appendix i.

<sup>5</sup> David C. Tambo "The 'Hill Refuges' of the Jos Plateau: A Historiographical Examination" *History in Africa*, vol. 5, (1978), 201.

<sup>6</sup> G. P. Buckley "The Forests of the Jos Plateau, Nigeria: I The Development of the Forest Estate" *The Commonwealth Forestry Review*, vol. 66: 2 (1987), 139 and 141. And Nengel, "The Politics...", 21

<sup>7</sup> Henry Gyang Mang "Land, Labour and Migrations in Central and Southern Plateau: Implications for Conflicts' Identity Construction" in Toyin Falola, Roy Doron and Okpeh O. Okpeh (eds) *Warfare, Ethnicity and National Identity in Nigeria*, (Africa World Press, 2013), 304-305.

<sup>8</sup> Nengel, *Politics and Cultures*, 28-46.

<sup>9</sup> S. U. Fwatshak "Reconstructing the Origins of the People of Plateau State: Questioning the 'We Are All Settlers' Theory" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, vol. 16, (2005/2006), 122-140.

<sup>10</sup> Nengel, *Politics and Cultures*, 28-46.

<sup>11</sup> Macham Mangut and Jonathan Oluyori Aleru "Archaeological Investigations on the Jos Plateau, Nigeria: A Case Study of Lankan" *West African Journal of Archaeology* vol. 50: 1 and 2 (2020), 1 and 12-14.

or sanctions, or through skirmishes that established the military prowess of some communities over others, hence the recognition of some groups as exceptional warriors.<sup>12</sup> In addition, the long periods of peaceful interactions among the multiple cultural groups that inhabited the Jos Plateau area were sometimes punctuated by external attacks, notably, from centralised political entities to the north of the area.<sup>13</sup> These attacks were sometimes repelled successfully.

The continuous influx of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds, into the Jos Plateau area over time, not only increased the ethnic plurality of the area but also fostered cultural assimilation that engendered ethnic similarities<sup>14</sup> on the one hand and induced sharp cultural contrasts on the other. The ethnic similarities, which we shall discuss in the next paper, fostered the emergence of affinities that created local identities.<sup>15</sup> These local identity groups maintained a deep sense of belonging to the Jos Plateau area. Cultural contrasts among ethnic groups in the Jos Plateau area did not entail very sharp distinctive attributes that made an ethnic group seem out of place from other neighbouring groups. This was so because there were many shared attributes, such as cuisine, world view and clothing, among the various cultural groups that inhabited the area.<sup>16</sup> Sharp cultural differences began to appear in the study area about a century before the coming of Europeans to the central Nigerian area.<sup>17</sup> The emergence of sharp cultural differences, in the Jos Plateau area, also exacerbated before the imposition of European rule to the area.<sup>18</sup> The cultural divisions were between some of the late migrant groups and indigenous groups. These divisions were exacerbated by British policies and they ultimately affected the long periods of peaceful interactions among the heterogeneous population in the area. The sharp divisions between cultural groups, in the Jos Plateau area, cumulatively degenerated into prolonged intermittent violent conflicts in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The protracted nature of the crisis has been attributed to the inability of authorities to manage local ethnic and religious plurality.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lamle Elias Nankap and Dora Tukura “Culture as Basis for Conflict Creation and Conflict Resolution in Africa” International Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies(IJPCS), vol. 6:1, (2019).

<sup>13</sup> C. G. Ames *Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria vol. IV: The Highland Chieftaincies, Plateau Province*, (London: Frank Cass,1934), 53-54.

<sup>14</sup> Mangut and Aleru “Archaeological Investigations on..., 13.

<sup>15</sup> Harold D. Gunn *Peoples of the Plateau Area of Northern Nigeria* (London: International African Institute, 1953, Routledge Edition, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> Gunn, *Peoples of the...*,

<sup>17</sup> Adamu Mahdi, *The Hausa Factor in West African History*. (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1978), 101.

<sup>18</sup> John Gara Nengel, “Echoes of the Sokoto Jihad and its Legacies on the Societies of the Jos Plateau” in *The Sokoto Caliphate: History and Legacies 1804-2004*, vol. 2, (Kaduna: Arewa House, Ahmadu Bello University. 2006), 181-188.

<sup>19</sup> Animasawun, “Managing Fault Lines, 12.

As mentioned earlier, violent conflicts, albeit intermittently, have occurred in the Jos Plateau area of Nigeria since 2001.<sup>20</sup> The intermittent conflicts, in the area, referred to as the Jos crisis witnessed violent confrontations that were perpetrated along ethnic and religious dichotomies.<sup>21</sup> These dichotomies emerged from the differences within local identity groups. The major post-colonial identity groups, in the Jos Plateau area, were formed through an admixture of global religions and local culture.<sup>22</sup> The global religions were Islam, on the one hand, and Christianity, on the other. Hence, majority of the members of certain local cultural groups converted from indigenous traditions to Christianity while significant numbers of other ethnic groups converted to Islam. As such, there existed a Muslim population that subscribed to the Islamic world view and based its interactions from a Muslim perspective, on the one hand, and a Christian population that interrelated from the context of a Christian world view on the other. It is important to note that although the two religions draw from Abrahamic<sup>23</sup> traditions, however, they are both exclusivist in nature. The inclination towards Islam or Christianity among people in the Jos Plateau area and the preponderance of ethno-religious perspectives in inter-group relations among the local population created a sharp division among inhabitants in the area. These divisions were either mobilised to engage in peaceful relations or to perpetuate conflictual interactions in the area.

As earlier mentioned intergroup relations, in the Jos Plateau area, consisted of both peaceful and antagonistic relations. However, our attention is on the degeneration of group interactions into violent confrontations in the area. As earlier mentioned, scholars of conflict management and peace studies, that have examined the Jos crisis, traced the source of the conflict to, among other factors, the fierce deployment of identity along ethnic and religious lines.<sup>24</sup> Despite that the underpinnings of ethnic and religious differences have been emphasised in the analysis of the history of inter-group contentions in the study area, however, the process through which the contending local identities were created has not been examined holistically. This task is undertaken by this article that serves as a precursor to a wider study. Being the first,

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<sup>20</sup> Higazi "Jos Crisis: A...,

<sup>21</sup> Kingsley L. Madueke "From Neighbours to...,

<sup>22</sup> See Samuel Sani Abdullahi, "A History of Wase Emirate 1817-2001" (Master's Dissertation, University of Jos, 2012), and Samuel Sani Abdullahi "A History of Christianity in the Jos Plateau Area during the Period of British Colonial Rule in Nigeria, 1900-1960" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of Johannesburg, 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Mervyn K. Lewis and Ahmad Kaleem "The Abrahamic Religions" in Religion and Finance: Comparing the Approaches of Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Elgaronline <https://doi.org/10.4337/9780857939036.00010>),10-39.

<sup>24</sup> For details see Danfulani et al "Briefing: The September..., Best, "Conflict and Peace.., Best, *Causes and Effects...*, and Jana Krause "Non-violence and...,

this article will serve as an introduction that will mainly elucidate on the conceptual framework of the study, specify the methodology adopted in the research, periodize the time span covered by work and conclude with an analysis of the first epoch of the time frame covered by the study. It is hoped that the outcome of this article will contribute to the overall aim of engendering truthful and sincere dialogues that will lead to the return of peaceful intergroup relations in the Jos Plateau area.

### **Concept of Belonging and Identity as Deployed in this Study**

On the one hand, the concept of “belonging” as deployed in this study refers to a shared sense of connectedness, by people, to a community based on a collective group identity.<sup>25</sup> Identity, on the other hand, has been unpacked as a valued sense of selfhood that is deployed to show affiliation, connectedness and commonality to a distinctive bounded group or category of people that involves a cognition of solidarity, togetherness and association among members.<sup>26</sup> Apart from projecting a sense of belonging identity is also used to mark boundaries that differentiate members of distinctive groups from outsiders. In this regard, identity is used to mark out distinctive cultural, social and political groups, based on differences such as religion, culture and race, gender, kinship and nationality, occupation and so on, from other groups.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, while members of an identity group share a sense of belonging that originates from shared affinities, however, the same set of affinities that binds group members together also serves as a marker that differentiates them from members of other groups, who also have their own shared sense of belonging. As such, identity within the scope of this work refers to boundaries that divide human communities from other human populations based on ‘their shared sense of belonging’ and ‘exclusivity’. The shared sense of belonging determines the admission of a person into a community, on the one hand, and exclusion from it, on the other. Simply put ‘identity’ in this article refers to the perception of ‘togetherness’, based on commonality by a group or groups of people, and the ‘exclusion’ of others due to the cognition of difference.

On the whole the concept of identity and belonging as elucidated above is drawn from the social identity theory that has been propounded by behavioural scientists. The theory attributes

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<sup>25</sup> Dawn R. Johnson et al “Examining Sense of Belonging Among First-Year Undergraduates from Different Racial/Ethnic Groups” *Journal of College Student Development*, vol. 48: 5, (2007), 525-542.

<sup>26</sup> Frederick Cooper and Roger Brubaker, “Identity” in Fredrick Cooper, (ed.) *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History* (Bekerly: University of California Press, 2005), 60.

<sup>27</sup> Cooper and Brubaker, “Identity”, 60.

identity to a psychological and ideological construct of belonging to a distinct group by an individual.<sup>28</sup> As such the individual draws his or her concept and definition of self from the attributes and characteristics that define the group to which the said individual has a sense of belonging to. Thus, the group identity subscribed to by an individual both describes and prescribes the behaviour, perception and outward character of the individual and its other members and offers the salient basis for self-regulation and self-evaluation.<sup>29</sup> However, the collective ‘in-group’ conduct of a social identity group in relation to non-members, who may belong to another or other groups, acquires competitive and discriminatory properties that sharpen inter-group boundaries and ultimately influences inter-group relations.<sup>30</sup>

## **Methodology**

We adopted the qualitative research methodology in conducting this study. The qualitative research methodology is primarily exploratory. It is used in this study so as to gain an understanding of the underlying reasons, motivations and factors behind the existence of sharply divisive identity groups in the Jos Plateau area. The methodology was also adopted to assist in the provision of insights into the context within which modern identity groups emerged and aid in illuminating the processes, experiences and problems that accompanied the construction of local identities in the study area over time, so as to discern how they became fodder for violent intergroup relations in the Jos Plateau area.

The qualitative research methodology is deployed, in this study, within the scope of the perspective of transitional justice. Transitional justice is a United Nations’ (UN) approach to dispute resolution that adopts the full range of both judicial and non-judicial processes and mechanisms in a society’s attempts to ensure post conflict reconciliation through accountability and justice with guarantees for non-reoccurrence of the events that led to the conflict being resolved.<sup>31</sup> As such, this study aligns with the non-judicial processes and mechanisms of transitional justice that address the root causes of conflicts through the search for truth that will correct erroneous perceptions/ perspectives and enable institutional reforms. We will draw from the attributes of transitional justice to address the root causes of identity conflicts through truth

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<sup>28</sup> Michael A. Hogg et al “A Tale of Two Theories: A Critical Comparison of Identity Theory with Social Identity Theory”, *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 58: 4, (1995), 259-260

<sup>29</sup> Hogg et al “A Tale of, 259.

<sup>30</sup> Hogg et al “A Tale of, 259.

<sup>31</sup> <https://unric.org/en/unric-library-background-transitional-justice> accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

seeking without bias to its other traits that seeks to ensure justice through reparations and institutional reforms as well as via the vetting, dismissals and prosecution of perpetrators.<sup>32</sup> Undertaking this research using the qualitative research methodology within the scope of transitional justice will allow us an insight into the underlying factors, that created identity based dichotomies that have entrenched ethnic contentions and religious friction among residents in the study area, so as to identify them and put them forward for the conduct of sincere dialogues and the passage of informed resolutions that will prevent their reoccurrence. At this point we begin the elucidation on the historical process that created a heterogeneous cultural landscape in the Jos Plateau area of central Nigeria.

### **Ethnic Heterogeneity in the Jos Plateau Area**

As earlier mentioned an outstanding feature of the Jos Plateau is the presence of numerous cultural groups that inhabit the area. Members of each cultural group spoke, and still speak, a distinct language. Members of these cultural/ language groups belonged to numerous polities that existed in the area during the pre-colonial period. Monday Yakiban Mangvwat estimates that four hundred polities and chiefdoms were in existence in the area as at 1900.<sup>33</sup> The widespread existence of politically independent units, even among speakers of the same or similar language(s) in the early years of colonial rule, points to the complexities in the heterogeneous nature of the pre-colonial Jos Plateau area. Scholars have affirmed this complexity in different studies.<sup>34</sup> As such J. H. Greenberg referred to the Jos Plateau area as a location of maximum language segmentation hinged on an ecology that served as a place of refuge or withdrawal.<sup>35</sup> Roger Blench stated that three out of the four language family phyla of Africa i.e. Afro-Asiatic, Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan have converged, interacted and overlapped, in the Jos Plateau area, over the centuries.<sup>36</sup> Despite the ethnic heterogeneity of the

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<sup>32</sup> <https://unric.org/en/unric-library-background-transitional-justice> accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2024.

<sup>33</sup> Monday Yakiban Mangvwat, *A History of Class Formation in the Plateau Province of Nigeria, 1902-1960: The Genesis of a Ruling Class*, (Durham North Carolina 27701: Carolina Academic Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>34</sup> For evidence on the numerous languages and cultural groups of the Jos Plateau area see Blench, Roger. et al *Advances in Minority Language Research in Nigeria*. vol. I, (Cologne: Rudiger Koppe Verlag, 2012); Language Map of Nigeria compiled by Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in collaboration with Geography Global Ministry System and Nigerian Bible Translation Trust, 2014; Nengel, "The Polities", 64-65; Isichei, Elizabeth. (ed) *Studies in the History of Plateau State Nigeria*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1982).

<sup>35</sup> Roger Blench "Language Families of Nigerian Middle-Belt and the Historical Implications of their Distribution" A Paper Presented at the Jos Linguistic Circle, Jos, 2007.

<sup>36</sup> J.H. Greenberg "African Linguistic Classification and the Language Map of Africa" in J. Ki-Zerbo (ed) *History of Africa I: Methodology and African Pre-History* (Paris: UNESCO and Heinemann, 1990), 121.

Jos Plateau area members of the various cultural groups in the area have maintained a deeply historic sense of intra and intergroup belonging that is infused with an equally deep sense of attachment to the topography of the area. This historic sense of belonging has been conveyed through local traditions, cooperative ventures such as inter-communal festivals, military alliances, intercultural marriages and economic exchanges. However, before we discuss intergroup interactions as part of the process of local identity formation in the Jos Plateau area we will, first, periodize the time frame covered by our study so as to glean the antiquity of human habitation in the area.

### **Periodization of the Time Span Covered in the Study**

The Jos Plateau area has been inhabited by people since the 6<sup>th</sup> millennium BC.<sup>37</sup> From that period onwards the population moved from one location to the other within the area.<sup>38</sup> Despite the evidence of antiquated human habitation in and around the Jos Plateau area there are no written records for most of the ancient era. As such, scholars who studied ancient periods in the history of the Jos Plateau area largely relied on the correlation between local traditions and archaeological evidence for its reconstruction. In this regard, historians of the area, John Gara Nengel and Monday Yakiban Mangvwat, have divided the history of human habitation, and the cultural and political development of the area into six periods.<sup>39</sup> They categorised the various epochs beginning with early human habitation of the area under the pre-historic period which they dated from 200BC to 1000AD. The second phase, they say, was predominated by migration caused by state formation of the second Kanuri Empire around the Lake Chad basin between 1100AD and 1700AD. The third they associated with activities of the Jukun of the upper Benue valley and their Kwararafa confederacy between 1600AD and 1800AD, while the fourth they associated with activities of Fulani herders, Hausa traders and the influence of the Sokoto Jihad in the area between 1800AD and 1902AD. The fifth they assigned to the colonial period between 1902 and 1960, which they say witnessed further massive immigration of the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Yoruba, Igbo and other groups from all over Nigeria as well as expatriates who came

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<sup>37</sup> R. N. York "Excavation at Dutsen Kongba Plateau State, Nigeria", West African Journal of Archaeology (WAJA), vol. 8 (1978), 139-163 quoted in Nengel, "The Politics and...", 27.

<sup>38</sup> Chiamaka Mangut "Human-environment Interaction and Paleoethnobotanical Evidence from Age Site: Dutsen Kura, Central Nigeria" Field Report for Liberal Arts Student Award for Research on Sustainability of the College of the Liberal Arts, Pennsylvania State University Accessed at <https://sustainability.la.psu.edu/news> on 25th November, 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Nengel, "The Politics and...", 27-56, Mangvwat, *A History of...*, 4 and Bulus, Ibrahim. et al *Plateau State: Heritage and Hope*. (Jos: Plateau State Government, 2001), 6-49.



chiefly to participate in the tin mining activities on the Jos Plateau; and finally the sixth from 1960 onwards, encompassed the post-independence period. I will, for the sake of this discourse align with their periodization because it fits into our earlier stated divisions of the ancient and late pre-colonial period, colonial and post-colonial periods for the history of human habitation in the Jos Plateau area and despite that it leaves out over 4 centuries of archaeologically proven dates for human habitation prior to 200BC in the study area. We will also use this sequence of periodization to analyse local traditions of autochthony, internal migration and subsequent immigration that took place over time in the area of study.

In line with the periodic divisions outlined above the scope of the analysis contained in this article will be restricted to the earliest part of the ancient period in the history of the Jos Plateau area. The chosen scope for this article, within the scope of the a larger study, resonates with a recommendation by Roger Blench, an Linguist Archaeologist with the Cambridge University's McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research and a Visiting Researcher at the Department of History and International Studies of the University of Jos, when he asked scholars of African history in general and those of Central Nigeria in particular to engage in the examination of local precolonial history, especially of events prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, so as to glean a deeper understanding of the social, economic and for us the cultural formation, composition and interrelations of precolonial African societies.<sup>40</sup> He emphasised further that analysing local traditions and synchronic ethnographies together with the adoption of new techniques in archaeological excavations will aid in efforts aimed at reconstructing the history of precolonial African communities.

At the time Blench made this suggestion, it seemed awkward that African scholars should be encouraged to look beyond the highly impactful colonial period in the history of the continent to an era where sources for its reconstruction were scarce and the complexities of group relations were thought to be few. However, the search for the beginning of disruptive factors in intergroup relations in the Jos Plateau area made the adoption of his suggestion, in this work, plausible. As such we begin our examination with analysis of traditions of autochthony, internal migration and the emergence of a sense of belonging by inhabitants of the Jos Plateau area of Nigeria.

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<sup>40</sup> Roger Blench "Reconstructing Society in Central Nigeria Prior to 1800" Seminar Presented at the Aliyu Akwe Doma Indoor Theatre, University of Jos, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2021.

## **Autochthony, Internal Migration and Belonging in the Jos Plateau Area**

Some cultural groups or sections of ethnic groups in the Jos Plateau area claim to be autochthonous to the area. Autochthony is the general belief in the entitlement and ownership of a territory by the first or earliest people to arrive there.<sup>41</sup> ‘First arrival’ is seen as the historical rights by a particular group of people to claim ownership of a territory.<sup>42</sup> Autochthonous people were found in the Jos Plateau area either as distinct communities or as clans or sub groups within larger local societies.<sup>43</sup> Autochthons in the study area were domiciled in different locations that stretched from the high lands to the surrounding plains of the Jos Plateau area. Despite their spread, in terms of location, autochthonous groups have certain similarities in the transmission of their local traditions. In this regard, groups or sub groups that claim autochthony either have traditions that trace their origins from places within their present abode or recount them in terms of short distance movements within the region of the same locality.<sup>44</sup> The traditions of such groups were essentially creation myths that accounted for the emergence of their ancestors in situ hence, endorsing their autochthonous rights either to territory, communal leadership or both. Autochthonous traditions served to give supremacy to certain families or clans and was the adhesive that bounded composite groups that integrated to form an ethnic category. Such local traditions point to grooves, caves or hill tops as the location where their supernatural progenitors emerged from.<sup>45</sup>

An example of autochthonous traditions in the study area is the Chen-A-Daress myth of the Daress. The Daress are a sub-group of the Ron Chadic language group, who inhabit the south western escarpment of the Jos Plateau.<sup>46</sup> The Ron are a composite group made up of an autochthonous clan and other sub-groups trace their descent from other ethnic affinities such as the Mupun and Mwaghavul.<sup>47</sup> According to the Daress tradition Chen-A-Daress, who emerged from the ground, was the legendary progenitor of the Daress. He was said to have been a 40 feet tall man with supernatural capabilities. As such, he was capable of undertaking the physical farm

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<sup>41</sup> Wybren Nooitgedagt et al “Autochthony Belief and Making Amends to Indigenous Peoples: The Role of Collective Moral Emotions” *Social Justice Research* vol. 34, (2021), 54.

<sup>42</sup> Nooitgedagt et al, “Autochthony Belief and...., 54.

<sup>43</sup> Nengel, “The Politics and...., 28

<sup>44</sup> Nengel, “The Politics and...., 28

<sup>45</sup> Nengel, “The Politics and...., 28

<sup>46</sup> Macham Mangut “An Archaeological Survey of Mangor in Ronland on the Jos Plateau” *Lapai Journal of Humanities*, vol. 9: 2 (2015), 201.

<sup>47</sup> David Zachariah Mahanan “A History of the Migration and Settlement of the Ron of Bakkus in Bokokos Local Government Area, Plateau State, Nigeria” (B. A. Long Essay, Plateau State University, Bokokos, 2022).

work of 10 people and simultaneously fought at multiple battles without conceding defeat. Chen-A-Daress drank local beverages from large jars. The tradition further states that he built ancient stone course-way bridges that were found in the Ron cultural area.<sup>48</sup> Chen-A-Daress was also said to have smoked a long pipe that brought out so much smoke was likened to a bush fire. The smoke was said to have risen high to the sky and caused rainfall. When Chen-A-Daress departed he was said to have either sunk back into the ground or left in the form of a whirl-wind that was accompanied with lightning and thunder.<sup>49</sup>

Another example of autochthonous traditions is taken from the Goemai, another composite Chadic speaking ethnic group, located in the southern plains of the Jos Plateau area. Within the Goemai ethnic nationality a sub group to the south claim ancestry from the Jukun, an ethnic group that inhabit the areas around the upstream parts of the River Benue, while those to the north say that they descended from the Ngas, another ethnic group that are domiciled to the north. However, a third section, that projects autochthonous rights, say that they descended from among the Tehl, a neighbouring ethnic group, at Lalin.<sup>50</sup> This section maintained that Lekni, their progenitor, married a girl from among the Tehl and eventually settled at Muduut. Over time Muduut has served as the cultural point of convergence for the Goemai where their paramount chief, the Long Goemai, resided. When Lekni died he was said to have been buried at Yuem hill located in the Mata Fada area of Tehl land. The Goemai have continuously held the site of Lekni's internment in reverence as it maintained a position of ritual value in their local cultural practices.

A third example of local traditions in the Jos Plateau area, that depicts autochthonous internal migration, is drawn from the myth of Turu.<sup>51</sup> The tradition is retained by some autochthonous sections of some communities located in the northern part of the Jos Plateau. According to the tradition Turu was a huge man with exceptional strength that was created by God. He was the progenitor of the early people and together with his off-spring built his settlement at Aturu where he ruled. The ancient settlement was located north of the current city of Jos along the Jos-Zaria road. The tradition further states that after a very long period of inhabiting Aturu the settlement was attacked and Turu was defeated. Unable to face defeat Turu

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<sup>48</sup> Macham Mangut "An Archaeological Survey of Mangor...",

<sup>49</sup> Mahanan "A History of...",

<sup>50</sup> Nengel, *Polities and Cultures*, 33-34.

<sup>51</sup> Nengel, *Polities and Cultures*, 28-29

and the residents of Aturu abandoned their abode and took flight in various directions. Turu was said to have taken refuge in a rock, the entrance of which was sealed off with a large stone, while members of his community dispersed and established the nucleus of some village settlements. The villages include Du, Gurum and Kishi, Kitara, Pokazo and Riguta. The tradition goes on to explain that the nuclei settlements were later on absorbed by various droves of migrants that converged on the Jos Plateau over the centuries. As such, Du was absorbed by the Berom, Gurum by the Buji and Kishi by the Rukuba while Kitara was assimilated by the Amo, Pakazo by the Jere and Riguta by the Anaguta.<sup>52</sup>

All the cultural groups and their composite sections in the Jos Plateau area have traditions that express their sense of belonging to their abode. The selected few that have been recounted here have not been repeated for the sake of documentation as this has been done elsewhere.<sup>53</sup> However, the importance of the local traditions to this study lies in their potency as material for historical analysis as suggested by of Blench. In this regard, the retention of the traditions recounted above, by indigenous people, shows their determination to store the memory of the antiquity of their habitation of the Jos Plateau area. As such these traditions also serve as a means to convey a deep rooted sense of belonging, not just to the general Jos Plateau area but, to particular locations where events from the distant past occurred.

In addition to the point made above, the local traditions that have been recounted here were chosen, among other available ones, because they convey not only a sense of belonging to the Jos Plateau area but also serve to assert indigenous peoples' claims to autochthony. Thus, as mentioned earlier, these traditions serve as a storage for the collective memory of the antiquity of groups that have inhabited the Jos Plateau since time immemorial. However, despite the purpose they serve, i.e. as storage for communal memory, these orally transmitted histories fall short of certain attributes of historical documentation. These defects include the lack of periodization, chronology and clarity. Although these traditions have shortcomings, these defects are common with oral histories of pre-literate African precolonial communities. Therefore, instead of discounting them we shall make efforts to corroborate their content with information from ethnographic studies conducted among the cultural groups in Jos Plateau area as well as with archaeological investigations carried out within the study area.

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<sup>52</sup> Nengel, *Polities and Cultures*, 28-29

<sup>53</sup> See C. K. Meek *The Northern Tribes of Nigeria*, (London: vol. I, 1925 and vol. II 1931), Ames *Gazetteers of the...*, and Gunn, *Peoples of the...*, among others.

Various ethnographic studies were conducted in the Jos Plateau area during the period of British rule in Nigeria. The early studies were conducted by colonial officials and Christian missionaries.<sup>54</sup> While British officials aimed to use the information obtained from their studies to increase their administration efficiency Christian missionaries needed to understand local culture so as to see how best to engage indigenous people in their quest to convert them to Christianity. Later on a number of Academic anthropologists studied and documented aspects of local cultures as part of their scholarly pursuits.<sup>55</sup> Materials from these studies will be engaged in subsequent articles. Despite the delay to engage these anthropological studies, we cannot help but glean from one of them. Hence, Harold Gunn, in his work referenced above, showed that some of the Berom from Du, the Anaguta and Buji held combined annual ritual ceremonies, during the period of British rule.<sup>56</sup> He also elaborated on how members of these cultural groups also engaged in inter group marriages among themselves. These points are important in buttressing the claims of a common ancestry from sections of these cultural groups. Other sources for the later part of the history of these ethnic groups also record how polities that belonged to these cultures made military alliances against foreign military incursions into their territories during the late precolonial period. Against the back drop of these few examples, we shall carry out a more detailed examination of inter group relations, as part of the analysis of belonging in the Jos Plateau area, in the subsequent articles from this study.

Another important source for the corroboration and authentication of information collected from local oral sources is archaeology. Archaeological studies have provided historians with dated remains of the material culture derived from excavations and accidental finds. Archaeologists who have worked in the Jos Plateau area have provided dates for rock shelters and accidental finds. These rock shelters include Dutsen Kongba, that is contiguous with Turu, Ropp Gana located between the Berom settlements of Barkin Ladi and the Ron habitations of the Bokkos area.<sup>57</sup> Other archaeological investigations have been conducted in Daress, Daffo and Bakkus, i.e. within the area inhabited by members of the Ron ethnic group, as well as in Kulere

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<sup>54</sup> Examples include A. J. N. Tremearne, *Tailed Head Hunters of Nigeria*, (London: 1912), O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, States and Emirates of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, (Exeter: 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1922) and Thomas Suffil, "The Birom" *Farm and Forest*, vol. 8: 4, (1943).

<sup>55</sup> They include Tanya Baker "The Social Organisation of the Berom" (Ph.D Dissertation, University College, London, 1954), J. H. Morrison "Jos Plateau Societies: Internal Change and External Influences, 1800-1935" (Ph.D Dissertation, University of London, 1976) among others.

<sup>56</sup> Gunn, *Peoples of the...*,

<sup>57</sup> Mangut and Aleru, "Archaeological Investigations on...", 3-4.

habitations within the western area of the Jos Plateau.<sup>58</sup> The Shendam area, that is contiguous with the Yuem hills has not gained from archaeological investigations but the Lardang and Mernyang hills to its west has benefitted.<sup>59</sup> Despite the impressive amount of archaeological investigations that have been conducted in the Jos Plateau area only one excavated location is directly linked to the local traditions that we recounted in this article. The singular location is the Daress site of the Chen-A-Daress myth studied by Joseph Mangut in 1986.<sup>60</sup> His study revealed a rock cave habitation and remnants of stone building foundations on the Daress hill. Thus, the Daress site stands as an isolated, archaeologically verified, example of the authenticity of autochthony as conveyed in a local oral tradition in the Jos Plateau area. The paucity of archaeologically corroborated sites therefore means a direct connection between evidence found in the other excavated sites, and locations mentioned in the local traditions recounted here, cannot be made. As such we make a call, that resonates with Blench's recommendation, for further archaeological investigations in central Nigeria as a whole and the Jos Plateau area. In particular, we recommend that professional archaeologists should consider the investigation of locations, mentioned in the various traditions of the numerous ethnic groups, in the Jos Plateau area so as to help in the provision of dated remains of local material culture. A positive response, to this clarion call, will be helpful in providing accurate information that is incumbent for more unambiguous historical reconstructions and interpretations of the precolonial history of the area under study.

Despite the pitfalls mentioned above there are grounds for optimism as regards the prospects of further archaeological studies in the Jos Plateau area. This optimism is hinged on the increase in the recent turnout of archaeological investigations in the area.<sup>61</sup> The increase in archaeological studies, in turn, is tied to the increase in the number of trained archaeologists indigenous to the area. These professional archaeologists have not only engaged in field studies but are also training future archaeologists in the, not too recently, established Department of Archaeology and Heritage Studies of the University of Jos. The effort of the new crop of archaeologists, by no small measure, complements the work that was began by an older generation of archaeologists from the University of Ibadan and the Ahmadu Bello University,

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<sup>58</sup> Mangut and Aleru, "Archaeological Investigations on...", 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Mangut and Aleru, "Archaeological Investigations on...", 4.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Mangut "An Archaeological Reconnaissance of Ron Abandoned Settlements" (M.Sc. Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1986), quoted in Macham Mangut "An Archaeological Survey of Mangor...", 200-201

<sup>61</sup> Macham Mangut "An Archaeological Survey of Mangor...", 200-201.

Zaria. If the increase in the number of local professional archaeologists translates into a surge in archaeological investigations then more scientific evidence, that will engender the need for further historical examinations and reconstructions of the history of precolonial communities and the internal and external interactions that ensued in the Jos Plateau area, will be made available.

### **Conclusion**

This article has achieved its purpose of making an introduction to a wider study that seeks to analyse the history of belonging in the Jos Plateau area. In doing so, the conceptual framework of the study has been constructed, the methodology adopted in the research has been specified while the long span of time in the history of the Jos Plateau area, to be studied, has been periodized. The analysis of belonging for the first epoch of the time frame covered by the research has also been performed. As mentioned earlier, it is hoped that the outcome of the whole study will contribute to the overall aim of engendering truthful and sincere dialogues that will lead to the return and retention of peaceful intergroup relations in the Jos Plateau area.

### **Appendix I**

List of ethnic/language groups and their geopolitical locations in Plateau State, Nigeria i.e the Post-Colonial Jos Plateau

Serial No	Name of Language/Group Identity	Language Categorization	Post-Colonial Geopolitical Location i.e. Local Government Area (L.G.A)
1	Afizere	Benue Congo	Jos North/Jos East
2	Amo	''	Bassa
3	Anaguta	''	Jos North
4	Aten	''	Riyom
5	Berom	''	Jos North, Jos South, Barkin Ladi and Riyom
6	Boghom	''	Kanam and Wase
7	Buji	''	Bassa
8	Chokobo	''	Bassa
9	Duguza	''	Bassa
10	Ganang	''	Barkin Ladi

11	Gusu	''	Bassa
12	Rigwe	''	Bassa
13	Janji	''	Bassa
14	Jhar	''	Kanam and Wase
15	Jere	''	Bassa
16	Jukun	''	Wase
17	Kadung	''	Mangu
18	Kurama	''	Bassa
19	Lemoro	''	Bassa
20	Pyem	''	Mangu/Kanam
21	Ribina	''	Bassa
22	Rukuba	''	Bassa
23	Tariya	''	Bassa
24	Taroh	''	Langtang North/ Langtang South/ Kanam/ Wase
25	Fulani	''	Wase (Jos North/ Barkin Ladi and other places where they are recognised as indigenes)
26	Yangkam	''	Wase
27	Bwall	Chadic	Qua'anpan
28	Bwarak	''	Pankshin
29	Chakfem	''	Mangu/Bokkos
30	Doemak	''	Qua'anpan
31	Fier	''	Pankshin
32	Goemai	''	Shendam/Qua'anpan
33	Jipal	''	Mangu
34	Keoneom	''	Mikang
35	Kulere	''	Bokkos



36	Kwagalak	''	Qua'anpan
37	Mhiship	''	Pankshin
38	Mernyang	''	Qua'anpan
39	Mupun	''	Pankshin/Mangu
40	Mushere	''	Bokkos
41	Mwaghavul	''	Mangu
42	Njak	''	Qua'anpan
43	Ngas	''	Kanke/Pankshin
44	Pai	''	Pankshin
45	Ron	''	Bokkos
46	Takas	''	Pankshin
47	Tal	''	Pankshin
48	Tambes	''	Qu'anpan
49	Tehl	''	Mikang
50	Teng	''	Qua'anpan
51	Youm	''	Mikang
52	Hausa	''	Jos North (and other places where they are recognised as indigenes)

Source: John Garah Nengel "The Politics of...pp.64-65, Roger Blench et al (eds) *Advances in Minority Language Research in Nigeria*, vol. I, Rudiger Koppe Verlag, Cologne, 2012 and NBT Library Jos: Compilation of Indigenous Languages in Plateau State, Nigeria.