

NOTES ON THE POLYCLOT POPULATIONS OF NKAMBE

by P. C. MAFIAMBA

Nkambe Division, the northernmost administrative unit of the Federated State of West Cameroon, is composed of a large number of ethnic communities which are as diverse in their various origins as in their languages and social set-ups. The smallest group numerically is the Mbaw while the largest, most evolved and most influential group is the Wimbun who occupy the centre of the Nkambe Plateau which is well known for its cold climate and beautiful, breath-taking scenery.

1. The Mbaw

The Mbaw people, numbering 3,238 in 1953, occupy the vast Plain of the same name in the south-eastern corner of the Division. It is the westward extension of the great Tikar Plain of Banyo Subdivision, East Cameroon. Nso farmsteads dot the southern part of the Mbaw Plain.

In Tikari language "mbaw" means flat land. The view of the Plain from the Nsob escarpment overlooking it in the west is one of the most impressive sights in the Federal Republic of Cameroon. The hot fertile plain is extremely suitable for large-scale mechanised agriculture and irrigation and the raising of such cash crops as palm oil trees, sugar cane, rice, cotton and yams. A beginning has been made in this direction by semi-State farms in Waziri (Ntem) and Bang.

The Mbaw Plain is also noteworthy in being the only place in West Cameroon where Tikari, in its original form, is still spoken as the lingua franca.

Mixed Origin

The "Report on the Cameroons Under United Kingdom Trusteeship" for 1958 defines the Mbaw as "a people of mixed Tikar and Mambila origin". This is only partly correct. When question-



Chief and Palace of Mbirikpa, Mbaw Plain

ed, most of the Mbaw say they are Tikari; but according to Buba, the old chief of Ngu, one of the largest villages in the area, only the dominant elements in Ngu, Ntem and Mbirikpa are of "pure" Tikari stock, having come direct from Kimi (Bankim), one of the four capitals of Tikari-land.

Apparently the cause of this emigration from Kimi was a desire for adventure, although some people now tend to link it with the expansion of the Fulani from Banyo. Both the rulers of Ngu and Ntem were princes from Bankim, while the ruler of Mbirikpa was a Quarter Head in Bankim. The Ngu prince Yamtuboh was the first to leave Bankim. He was followed by the Ntem prince Jinoh, brother of the former; and last came the Mbirikpa chief. The Ngu left Bankim coming directly and settling in the old town Mbuweh, about 2 miles south-east of the present village of Ngu. When the Ngu arrived they found the land already occupied by seven groups of autochtones, six of whom (viz. Nyitikwa, Nyegayengbe, Nyitangum, Nyatalah, Nyigamgbe and Jikwambaw—these sound like Tikar names) were conquered and assimilated, now forming only quarters of Ngu, while the seventh group, the Yekwanku, fled to Ntem.

As for the Ntem, they left Kimi, spent some time at Mobua (near present day Nguri) and thence moved on to Mbago (Ngu) and Nkulo before arriving at Ntem where they conquered and assimilated the autochtones, the Ogha. According to the Nwanti, the Ntem arrived from Bankim after the Nwanti were already installed in the area; the Ntem first settled on Mbago Hill, said to have been given them by the Nwanti. Whatever the case, the Ntem subsequently appear to have tried, unsuccessfully, to assert paramountcy over the other Tikar groups in the Mbaw Plain; hence relations between Ntem and Ngu are particularly strained.

The last emigration from Tikar-land consisted of three Tikar princes who left Buh, a Tikar settlement south-west of Bankim, and after "sleeping" at Bah (in Bamum) crossed the Magbe River and arrived in Nwanti where they first settled on Kware hill after conquering and assimilating three groups of Kaka people. The other two Tikar princes from Buh pushed onwards to establish themselves at Jatto (north of the Plain) and Nwar (east of Mbirikpa). The Tikar who settled in Jatto were attracted by raffia wine; Jatto is now a mainly Kaka-speaking area.

How Long Implanted?

The genealogy of the Ngu Chiefs is as follows:

1. Yantuboh (ex-Kimi, settled at Mbuweh)

2. Kundung

3. Kebkah

4. Fankung

5. Fanimoh

6. Batu (First attack by Banyo Fulani)

7. Montchap (Chief when Nolte was assassinated in Banyo
(?—? 1910) (by Umaru on 1st February 1902))

8. Lipa
(? 1910)
(8 months)

9. Shirong
(?1910-1926)
(Moved to Ngu,
end of 1918)

10. Nyitisong
(1926-1956)
(1956-1963)

12. Buba
(1963 —)
(Born when
Germans entered
Banyo, 1902)

Montchap was chief when the Germans arrived peacefully in the Mbaw Plain from Nso on their way to Banyo in February (or? January) 1902. Before him was Batu during whose reign the Banyo Fulani started knocking at the gates of the Mbaw Plain. But the Fulbe-Wute/Tikar battle at Sambolabbo took place in 1840 and Hamman Dadi established Fulbe rule over the Wute (Babouté) city of Banyo in 1842. After that, attention was directed to the Mambilla to the west and it wasn't till Hamman Dadi established himself at Gashaka in 1873 that attention was paid to the region south of Banyo. It is thus reasonable to conjecture that the Ngu and other Mbaw Tikar emigrated from Bankim around 1800 if not earlier, due to domestic reasons not connected with the expansion of Adamawa, as frequently stated by English scholars.

Ethnic Groups.

In the Mbaw Plain the villages can therefore be classified ethnically and linguistically as follows:

"Pure" Tikari

Ntem (though they now speak with some infusion of Kaka, Ngu, Mbirikpa, Nguri and Nwanti.

"Pure" Mambila (Do not understand Tikari)

Li (pronounced Lui), Bang and Yadiji.

Mainly Mambila—but bicultural, understand Tikari.

Nwat and Ngom (including its various Quarters: Ngomkwa, Ngomkila, and Sabongari—a town mostly inhabited by Banyo Fulani and Hausas.)

Mixed Tikar/Kaka

Jatto

'Pure' Kaka

Nking—an independent village; they understand Tikar, but poorly. From the foregoing account it is evident that the autochthones in the west of the Plain were Kaka while those in the east, from Nwat to Songkolong, in the Banyo Subdivision of East Camero, and northwards into the Mambila District of Northern Camero, were Mambila. It must be emphasized, however, that both the Kaka (Mbem) and Mambila, who are kith and kin, claim (the former at least) to be earlier emigrants from Kimi, as do also the Mfume. This claim, which is backed by very strong oral traditions, would tend to support Jeffrey's thesis that the name 'Tikar' is a blanket name for heterogeneous ethnic groups. On the other hand, it is possible that like groups descended from the So or Sao (Barth) and the Ejagham (Ekoi) (Talbot) differences in language and customs have arisen with distance and time, among Tikar people who were once one people.

Active Links with Kimi.

The Mbaw Tikari maintain active cultural links with Kimi. The language, dress, facial marks, hierarchical social set-up (with Nji's and Yeah's) and architecture of the houses do not differ from those observed in Bankim. The latter day Fulani influence in religion, language and dress which is observed in Bankim is also seen in the Mbaw Plain. But underneath the outer paping of Fulani and Muslim influence subsists traditional Tikari 'pagan' culture. For

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example: a successor to the Ngu throne must either go to Bankim or have brought to him a pot of 'water' from Bankim with which he must bathe before he settles down to rule. In former times the pot of 'water' was not surrendered till the 'ndinda' (messenger) was given a young girl to be the wife of the ruler of Bankim; nowadays cloth is given.

Formerly no cash was paid as bride price—only salt, palm oil and labour in kind. Nowadays a dowry is paid in cash £6 or more. The choosing of a successor to the chief is as among the Wimbumb with whom there is blood relationship.

2. The Wimbumb.

The Wimbumb (or more popularly 'Nsungli', a corruption of the Nso nickname 'Nsungnin' meaning 'chatterers') comprise three distinct clans Warr, Tang and Wiya which emigrated from the west Tikar capital of Kimi. Although the three groups arrived on the Nkame Plateau at different times, it is remarkable that they all speak one language, Liwimbumb, which has only a few words of Tikari, although with regional variants, the purest Liwimbumb being spoken in the Warr area between Mbot and Watt villages. Jeffreys' quotes the Warr village head of Nsob as saying:

"We have a tradition that Kimi is part of the Mbumb people who lived near Beriberi, Yola way. Our language is called Liwimbumb. This is the name for the language of all these people whom the Bansa call Nsungli. Li means tongue or language... Wi in Liwimbumb means people, so Liwimbumb means the language of the Mbumb people. At Kimi the talk was not Liwimbumb but Tikari which language is not spoken or even known here".

The Warr

The Warr were the first inhabitants to arrive on the Nkame Plateau which they found uninhabited. They settled at Mbiribaw, now a Quarter of Mbot village. Although it is on record that the Warr came from Kimi, most of the young men affect not to know this and even deny that their ancestors came from anywhere other than the 'sacred' pond at Mbiribaw (Mbot Farm). The emigration from Kimi was, however, confirmed to me by several old people and most notably by the Chief of Chup who was enlightened in the matter by the old men of his village.

Altogether 14 Fons (rulers) lived and died in Mbiribaw before the Clan Head Njah moved to Mbot. The genealogy of the Mbot

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Fons after Njah is well remembered:

1. Njah
2. Tonji
3. Tokob (? — 13-10-32)
4. Mbunwe (1932 - 17-3-56)
5. Tokob Tangem Abraham (1956 -)

Of these rulers Njah died at Wanti, a Quarter of Watt village, where he is buried. Tonji, Tokob and Mbunwe died at Mbot and are buried in the Palace. Tonji was the Fon when the Germans arrived. Before that, he was harassed by the Banyo Fulani and the Nso. He died an old man. His successor Tokob died after the First World War at the age of 60. He is said to have ruled for about 25 years. The next ruler was Mbunwe who had trouble with the English who wanted to depose him. The people opposed this move, saying that a Fon cannot be chosen while the previous one is still alive—hence after some years of exile in Bamenda the Fon was brought back to Mbot. The present ruler was recalled from secondary school and made Chief.

The scattering of the Warr Clan.

The scattering of the people at Mbiribaw is said to have been due to an insufficient water supply at the pool and this caused the brothers to fight among themselves. The Fon, noticing that his people were fewer in number asked what had happened to them; the answer his councillors gave was "Warr", meaning "scatter". The people of Warr Clan thus scattered and emigrated to various points in Nkambe Division and even beyond.

Places founded as a result of the dispersal of the Warr are
Nkambe Division: 1. **Ntrumbaw**—meaning a pit dug for trapping animals—that was the occupation of the people.

2. **Sop** (Nsob)—meaning red water near raffia bush—their work was catching fish.

3. **Chup**—meaning tapping 'mimbo', a sweet drink got from the raffia palm. These three places come high in the order of precedence in the Warr Clan. Their rulers treat with the Fon of Mbot on a footing of equality.

4. Other Warr villages in Nkambe founded by later emigrants from Mbiribaw include **Nkambe** (including Moh, Njema and Binju Quar-



The fon of Konchep, Nkambe Division 1965



Mbembe implements L. to R. Edo (game of dice)
Stool, (Mbaw) wooden Shield (Nko)

ters), Binshua, Kungi, Saa (near Binshua), Njap (near Tabenken), Watt, Wangri and Mbah (near Watt). These Warr Clan villages were formerly subject to the Fon of Mbot and their chiefs were enthroned by him (after being chosen in the traditional manner by their own village notables); but nowadays there is a tendency for the rulers of these villages to assert their independence vis-à-vis Mbot.

5. Other villages alleged to be founded by emigrants from Mbot are:

a Warr Quarter in Tabenken, Mbande & Akweja (Mbembe area), Adere (Mfumte area) also called Nkangri, Nchanti, Kiwo, Bem, Mfume, Dumbo, Mbissa and Kamine (all in Misahe area). Warr claims in this regard are very tenuous and are not generally considered by the people concerned.

Places outside Nkambe Division

1. The **Noni**, notably Njinjep and Kochi in Nso Division. The Kochi came from Mbiribaw and the Njinjep's old quarter is in Nkambe Town to which they return annually to offer sacrifice. When a Noni Chief dies the news is conveyed to the Fon of Mbot under Nso (Kimbo) suzerainty, though retaining their own chiefdoms. According to Kaberry² the Noni (Djottin-Vitum) conquered autochthones which they found on arrival at their present homes.

2. **Oku**. The old home of the Oku is where the Baptist Mission in Mbot Farm (Mbiribaw) is established. The Oku were later conquered by an Nso prince. Of this principality Glauning³ wrote: "Oku lies between Bikom and Bansa and stands in friendly relations with both these lands which exceed it in size".

3. **Bum**. Emigrants from Mbiribaw established this large though thinly populated independent chiefdom in Wum Division. According to Kaberry² Bum conquered autochthones whom they found on arrival. A new Fon of Bum goes to Mbot and makes a sacrifice there and takes away 'water' from Mbot with which he bathes before he starts ruling. Bum used to be an important centre of the Bum Clan published as Appendix VI to 1927 Report on British Cameroons pp. 124 — 128.

4. **Esu**: This is another extensive though thinly populated independent chiefdom in the Wum Division founded by emigrants from Mbiribaw. According to oral traditions, the Esu first settled

at Ndiwum, an abandoned site close to present day Baf-Meh in Wum Division⁴. From there a spear was thrown which fell in present day Esu and thither the Esu moved and conquered the original inhabitants the **Wekar**, some of whom fled to Northern Nigeria and some were assimilated in Esu Town where they have their own Quarter Head. (Were the 'Wekar' part of the Wukari, Jukums of Northern Nigeria, or an aboriginal group like the Munka, or a Wiekum outpost like Fang of Fungom?). A hill near the customs post at Esu has been pointed out as an abandoned settlement of the 'Wekar'. In their westward march towards Kawana (Gayama) on the frontier, the Esu conquered a few more aboriginal peoples at Munka; these aborigines are now all but extinct. The Esu also crossed the Katsena Ala (Kumbi) river and extended their sway over the aboriginal Zumperi (Likam). In former days Esu was a powerful chiefdom.

The Warr are also related to some of the Mbaw Tikar. Ngu, Mbirikpa and Ngom (Ngomkuku) make sacrifices at Mbot and the death of their chiefs is announced to Mbot (and vice versa) with the killing of a cock. This relationship is said to be due to their common family origin from Kimi.

The Tang Clan.

The Tang Clan are descended from the Ba-Ngu in the Mbaw Plain. First the Clan Head Talah left Ngu and established at Talah village on the Nkambe Plateau where the Warr were already established. Emigrants from Talah founded the following villages: Ntundip, Kup, Taku, Sina, Tabenken (or Tang or Tambaw—the old popular name 'Tang' was given because many people were drowned while crossing a stream there), Binka—emigrants founded Njimjong (Mayo Binka) not quite 50 years ago after a Hausa, who left Binka which was then suffering from famine caused by locust, had demonstrated that the land was fertile—and Ngarum.

According to oral traditions gathered by Jeffreys¹¹ the Tang are also of Bankim origin. The Tang came from Bankim with Ngulu, the Tang settling first at Bajeng (Bamala or Mala) and later at Tang Tala, the boundary with Ndu being at Maya (where a slave was slaughtered and buried by the two chiefs). Other Tang settlements are Sinna, Mbiogo, Wowo in Nkambe Division, and Tam-bam in Nso territory near Kishong.

The Wiya Clan.

The last of the Wimbun to arrive in Nkambe were the Wiya

Clan. According to ama, the Fon of Konchep, and his know ledgeable old Prime Minister Ntaw Shey, the Wiya Clan came from Kimi—the name of the leader is not remembered—and separated from the Ngu, Ntem etc. and then took a north-westerly direction to Mbayou (thought to be in the Kaka or Mfumte area), and thence to Mbiribua (Mbembe area)—where some of them remained to establish the present village—and finally to Mbatoka at Konchep, near the Fon's Quarters, and overlooking Mbembe-land below.

Konchep land was said to be unoccupied and no war was waged to occupy it. According to the sub-chief of Moh village, however, Konchep land was occupied by the Moh of Warr Clan, they, however, fled before the invading Wiya who came on horseback exclaiming "mbara", this was the first time that the Moh people had seen horses. The Konchep in fact are said to have got their horses from the Banyo Fulani (which would tend to place the wiya migration after 1850); hence the Warr believed that the Wiya came from Banyo. The ruler of Moh further stated that the Chief and people of Akwaja (Mbembe) came from Mbatoka.

The Ntem claim that it was Montensih, the son of a Yaah of Ntem, who led the Wiya emigration to Ndung (Ndu).

After the arrival of the Wiya at Konchep three Chiefs (names forgotten) ruled there and died in old age before the clan scattered. After the death of the third chief, Ndowa succeeded to the throne and it was one of his sons, Nganji, who left the Mbindung Quarter of Konchep and established the powerful chiefdom of Ndung (Ndu).

The known genealogy of Konchep is as follows:

- Ndowa
- Nkuti
- Nakpwo (?—1954)
- Jama (1954—)

All the rulers of Konchep seem to have lived to a ripe old age. Nakpwo was the Chief when the Germans arrived peacefully. Jama the present Fon was installed the year Nkambe station was established (1954). The Konchep did not wage war either with the Fulani or the Mbembe; they abhorred bloodshed.

The emigration from Konchep to Ndung (Ndu) is said to have proceeded via the Mfumte area as follows:

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Konchep—Mbanji (Mfumte)—Rokop—Mba-Ndung (near Tea Estate)—Kwuiya (Wiya) or Ndu (Ndu).

On arrival at Kwuiya (Wiya)—now Ndu Market Square—the Konchep prince (according to Warr sources) met a Warr man, one Ngawenfu, the landlord of the place; he was subsequently assimilated into Ndu. In due course Ndu entered into relations with Banyo Fulani and since the latter were held in awe, Ndu, whose people alone understood Fulfulde, grew in power and prestige. Nganji, the first Fon of Ndu, was the eldest son of the Fon of Konchep, Ndowa. He had a powerful personality—hence he became the head of the Wiya Clan.

The Wiya Clan consists of Konchep, Ndung (Ndu), Luh (near Ntundip) and Ngulu (near Ntumbaw). Other Wiya offshoots ex-Konchep are integrated in Bih and Dingegheh in the Tang Clan area and Ndiboti and Yamba Quarter in Mbot Farm in the Warr Clan area.

The story of the founding of Bih is interesting. A Konchep man was travelling from Konchep to Ndu. On reaching Bih his hen hatched chickens. He also found the soil fertile and hence settled there.

The Warr claim as regards the Wiya is supported by Jeffreys¹¹ who states that "The Wiya are fairly recent Tikar immigrants... The old capital was Mbandu, the present one is called Ndu by Europeans..." "The leader of the Wiya migration from Bakimi was Nyiakunji according to Mbotshafi of Mbiripbo (Mbiribwa—Mbembe) and confirmed by the Wiya chief, Mfomi. The Wiya leader, Nyiakunji, and the Mbiripbo (Mbiribwa) leader, Nsa, left Bakimi together. Both leaders camped near a hill called Mbia. Leaving Mbia, they next settled at Ne but as Ne was too hot, Nyiakunji and the other lesser chiefs left Ne for Konshep (Konchep), parting company with Nsa whose group remained at Ne. The Wiya people continued their migration through Mbembe country... Ndimbia¹¹, a Ndu court official, stated: "The names of our chiefs known to us are: 1. Nyiakunji 2. Towiji 3. Mfokotu 4. Mfosisimbe 5. Yamussi 6. Mfontingo 7. Mfolowa 8. Nonebit 9. Mfoburi 10. Mforambo 11. Mfu 12. Mfomi (the present chief—? 1944). Nyiakunji led us from Bakimi. His first settlement was at Ndimme or Ndiipnee, now called Mbiripbo (Mbiribwa) by the Mbembe. The Mbiripbo (Mbiribwa) chief, though of the Wiya family, was an independent chief and left us to find Mbiripbo (Mpiribwa). From Ndimme, Nyiakunji with the whole party of

migrants which included a number of independent lineages moved to Konep...". Under Mfokotu the migration moved on but spin-off settlements as follows: Konep...

In support of Warr claims Jeffreys¹¹ states that "the autochthonous inhabitants who were in the country when the Warr arrived are represented by the present-day Lu, while the neighbouring Rom (Mbem area) found the Wiji. Another name by which the indigenous people were known to the Nso is Noli (Noli today represented by such villages as Lassin and Djotin, now subjects of Nso. The Ntut, also local indigenes, have entirely disappeared". Jeffreys further states that the chief of Ntut, or Lassin land under Nso, is a Lu man and that Ngulu is an independent Wiya group never under Ndu.

Certain Wiya claims are also discussed and disposed of. The Lu are of Noli origin, though now under Wiya. Rom and Wiya are related but independent, the Ntem (Mbaw Plain) are separate from Wiya, though both groups left Bankim together. The Ndu Chief is emphatically not of Ntem origin, as falsely claimed by Ntem in the 1920's and hotly contested by Ndu.

The Wiya, Ndu in particular, as allies of Banyo Fulani, waged constant warfare against the Noli autochthones in the Kibim river Binshua, etc. **The Mbembe Mbiribwa** P. 12 (Under Oral Traditions) **Addendum.**

Jeffreys¹¹ was told that Berabe is of Bamum origin and that it waged war with Mbiribwa. The latter was led from Kimbi by Nsa who settled first at Mbia Hill, then at Ekuo and finally at Mbiribwa.

Highly Organised Society.

Undoubtedly the Wimbun have the most highly evolved society in Nkambe. Fons like those at Ndu and Mbot are really powerful political figures and under them are Chiefs of villages sub-chiefs of smaller villages, quarter heads and titled notables both men and women. Among the men are **Fais** (usually brothers of Chiefs) and **Njis** (notables). Among the women are the **Yaahs** (usually princesses; but commoners may also be appointed **Yaahs** by the Chief. In Mbot, for example, there are **Yaah Muyang** (the principal **Yaah**, usually the reigning Chief's sister. She wears a set of leopard teeth as a necklace to show her rank).

Yaah Fambot, **Yaah Manju**, **Yaah Titu** (very powerful), **Yaah Yewong**, **Yaah Tangse** and **Yaah Mala** (daughter of a sub-chief, appointed by the Fon—she controls all the king's wives). The **Yaahs** are very powerful and one dares not displease them. Once appointed by the Fon and his notables they hold office for life. No dowry is given or demanded in respect of their marriage. As a rule they come and go as they please and no questions are asked.

The Chiefs and notables are distinguished as much by their dress (Bali Chamba or Bikom Cloth) as by the stools on which they sit. First class Fons like those of Konep, apart from wearing the usual ivory bangle, wear a necklace of leopard teeth and sit on a "kapla", a wooden throne with a seat carved on the back of a leopard. A sub-chief on the other hand contents himself with a staff and a black stool with a spider motif. High ranking **Fais** and **Njis** sit on a stool with a red spider motif. It is out of the question for a commoner to sit on these stools.

Around the Fon are a number of **secret societies** which have their meeting houses in the palace grounds viz: **Mfuh** (Chief of the secret societies), **Nwarung** (Kwifon—a very powerful secret police), **Ngiri**, **Samba**, **Manjong** and **Nkuh** ("juju" for dance). These societies meet on certain days, and there is usually dining and winning while affairs are discussed.

Cheftaincy.

The Chief is a powerful figure, the focus of all power and prestige. He rules in council. But though he is something more than a chairman of committees or *primus inter pares* he cannot rule as an autocrat, oblivious of the opinion of his councillors.

Succession to the chieftaincy is usually from father to one of his sons, rarely from brother to brother. The matter is settled in a secret conclave summoned by the reigning chief when he feels the end is near. The Fon, having observed his children, proposes the one whom he thinks fit to succeed. If his notables do not like dates. A debate then ensues and a consensus is arrived at, to which the Fon is party, regarding the most suitable person to be successor. Their final decision is kept secret, even unknown to the chosen heir. In exceptional circumstances the notables reverse their decision on the death of the chief and choose another member of the Chief's family if they feel that the character of the Chief elect is not conducive to the good government and peace of the land. Succession takes place immediately on the death of a rei-

gning chief. If the chief elect is not immediately available one of the Yaahs is put on the throne and she acts as Regent till the Chief elect arrives. Thus the throne is never left vacant even for a short time; the new Chief assumes power even before his predecessor is interred. Unpopular chiefs are and can be dethroned by their councillors—this happened not so long ago in Nkambe town—but this is not an easy process; the deposed chief may be allowed to stay if civil peace is not threatened and he is allowed income from any personal property not connected with the throne.

The death of a chief is kept secret; the first intimation of the decease of a chief is the enthronement of his successor in secret. The new chief remains in secret retreat (but receives visitors) in the Palace for about one month before being publicly introduced to the people by the *Shay* (Prime Minister) and five *Tala* (sub-chiefs). The six notables bring him to an assembly if the people and make him stand on leopard skin on which he dances. There is general merriment and dancing and presents are showered on him.

Elaborate ceremonies also take place for the installation of a *Nji* (one of the highest ranking notables). In Chup where I was fortunate to witness the ceremony, the installation of a successor to a deceased *Nji* takes place about three weeks after the decease of the incumbent. The successor mourns his predecessor and sleeps on a plain leaf on the floor of his predecessor's house for three weeks. At the end of this period the Village Head (*Fon*) formally installs the new *Nji* amidst much rejoicing, feasting and dancing. The new *Nji* then sleeps on a bed after donning an attire of a cap, two sashes worn baldric-wise and embroidered with cowries, the skin of a small water animal tied round the waist and camwood tailed with his *Mfu*; this is a young girl of about 8 years who is similarly dubbed with camwood and wears a sash embroidered with cowries round the waist. After his installation the new *Nji* has to spend 3 to 4 weeks in retreat in the same house during which he does nothing except eat and rest; he has become fat by the time he leaves the retreat house.

Marriage.

Formerly, apart from the firewood, drinks and labour in kind which the son-in-law provided, a dowry consisted of 14 *Bikom* Cloths, costing anything from £14 to £28. Nowadays the dowry is paid for in cash and is in theory equivalent to the price of 14 *Bikom* Cloths. Formerly a father could even give his daughter in marriage

to a hard-working and cooperative son-in-law who would pay the dowry later when he had the means or after giving his own daughter in marriage.

A word on the *Bikom* Cloth. This cloth is not made by the Kom as the name suggests but by the Jukum of Wukari, Northern Nigeria. But these cloths were first appreciated and introduced into trade in the Central Cameroonian Grasslands by the Kom. They are used for making stately gowns for notables and such gowns are worn on important social occasions.

3. The Mbembe

The Mbembe who are the second largest ethnic group in Nkambe Division are quite distinct and dissimilar from any of their neighbours. Owing to the poor communications in the district they are the least known in Nkambe. They occupy part of the upper reaches of the Donga River, those south of this river, the majority, forming part of Nkambe Division in West Cameroon, while those north of the river in the United Hills District of Northern Cameroon (the so-called Sardauna Province) are now called Tigon or Tigwon (*Meek*). The partition of Mbembe-land dates from 15th November 1926 when the 1,165 Sq. mls. Kentu District was detached from Bamenda Division and annexed first to Gashaka Division and then to Wukari Division of Northern Nigeria on 1st April 1933. Among other reasons, it was stated that the Tigon were cognate with the Takums and had less in common with their kith and kin south of the Donga. But in 1934 the Mbembe applied to the Resident of Bamenda to be joined to the northern Tigon. According to Kaberry there are also some Mbembe villages in the Fungom sub-district of Wum Division.

The Cameroon Mbembe should not be confused with an Eja-gham ethnic group of the same name found around Obubra in Ogoja Province on the Cross River. Our own Mbembe are in fact better known by their Nso nickname "Njari" which is derived from their native word "Izare" meaning "I say" (Newton?). An interesting first account of this people was written by the famous German District Officer of Bamenda, Capt. Glauning, who visited the area in 1905. (In German literature the Mbembe are referred to as "Tukum" or "Tugum"). The passages below are extracted from Glauning's interesting report on the north-western part of the old Bamenda Province.

Glaunings Report³

"By way of Kanko (Akwenko) the expedition the next day reached Mandi (Mbende) which is situated on steep rocky ridges. We found the place, which is by far the dirtiest of all not too clean and shield, had occupied adjacent hills intent on having no dealings, but they attempted to attack the porters and boys near the water points and sounded their war yelling all round the camp, so it was necessary to give them some correction. They moved back before the patrols but sat down firmly with strong will on a fast river and this was forced and the Mandi people fell back and were pursued further on. On 15 September Tschaeft (Jev) was entered after 1 1/4 hours continuous marching. The Mandi chief had in the meantime announced his submission and meanwhile delivered 2 small elephant tusks. He wished to sell some big tusks in Kambo (Nkambe). In Tschaeft (Jev) the expedition was received friendly, likewise on the next day in Berabe which lies on a hill about 200 to 300 metres above the river bed. The whole terrain is immensely rugged. Deep streams and ravines interchange with steep hills and mountains... From Berabe we marched through very rugged terrain to the mountain village of Ko (Akoo)... we reached the small villages of Eka and Amba on 19th September via Kodja (Akwaja) village which, situated on the slope of the Mambila mountain, is rich in gum and ivory.

There where the tributaries of the Donga river are very deep in the rainy season and cannot be crossed without canoes, we gave up the intention of marching direct to Nama along this river, and high on the edge of the plain. The Chief of that place was very happy when he was informed that he would have no more to fear from the Fulbes and that therefore his village could be moved from the barren mountains once more to the plain. In the rainy season the direct road Bogu-Nama is unpassable on account of marshes. We had therefore first to march to Kentu... Here as elsewhere the natives also live hidden in the mountains... Kentu is a principal centre for the trade in kola and gum and lies on the big highway Dumbo-Kentu-Nama; the region is very fertile... The Donga River is about 200 to 300 metres wide, deep and rapid. In the rainy season it extends to Nama and is probably even navigable for steamers in its upper course up to near the Mambila Plateau. The cross-

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sing can be done with only one canoe which owing to the strong current takes 25 minutes for each to and fro trip. Fifty minutes distant from the river lies the big town of Nama which creates the impression of some Hausa village. Men and women of the Tukum mountain villages go there completely naked, meet with the plains Tukum dressed almost all in Hausa manner. Atschoku village which I reached on the next day (and) situated on a high hill and well cultivated is the last Tukum village.

The Tukum are also handsomely built people of medium height with well formed features. In particular the Tukum women present a very handsome appearance...

The tribes of the highlands as well as the Bafums (Wum) and Dumbos carry as weapons spears and dane-guns; the Tukum of the hilly areas spears, bark-shields and a short knife; the Tukum of the plains the Ndosos as also the Munchi natives arrows and bows. The arrows are tipped with *strophantus*... According to Taylor the Tukum and Djukum (Jukum) languages are very much alike...

The Tukumland areas exchange palm oil against kola in Kambo (Nkambe) ... all the tribes of the transitional lands and the plains people are divided into numerous, independent from one another, frequently hostile areas. Such disunion we find especially in Bafum (Wum) and Tukum (Mbembe). In the last land nearly every village is at war with the other. This disunion explains also why the Tukum put up so little resistance to the invasions of the Fulbe which have taken place since nearly twenty years till recent times. The latest invasions of the Fulbes from Gashaka took place: October 1904 in Adiri (Mfumte area), November 1904 in Kodja (Akwaja) and Tukum; January 1905 in Bogu. From the latter village the Fulbe withdrew because they heard of the war of the (Bamenda) Station in Bekom..."

Land of Ishmaels

As can be deduced from Glauning's report, the Mbembe never had and still do not have any paramount chief. No village ever lorded it over the other, and even in a village the chief is only the titular head. Notables there are—they carry a short broom in the right hand as the insignia of their office—but the egalitarianism and republican spirit are very marked. For example, if a chief does not work, climb palm trees to collect his own palm wine or palm nuts, or go hunting with them, his subjects beat him up. The

chief is disobeyed with impunity by anyone, though if his people love him, as they did the old blind Chief Mbamu of Berabe, his people will do everything he wants.

Heterogeneity

The Mbembe area has been a place of refuge from invasions and wars. Also lying on the trade routes from the highlands of Central Cameroon to the Benue Plains of Nigeria, the Mbembe received infusions of "foreign" blood. In appearance and customs they are akin to the so-called 'Kirdi' of Central and Northern parts of East Cameroon as well as the Bachama (a Batta group) and Jukun of northern Nigeria—all emigrants from the Lake Chad basin and the upper Benue basin in East Cameroon. The Jukun affinity is particularly marked in their difficult tonal language which is like none other in Nkambe.

Oral Traditions

By and large, my investigations confirmed what Newton⁷ wrote about the origins of the Mbembe.

The earliest inhabitants of the Mbembe area were the Zembemba and Ako; their origin is unknown. The Zembemba were later assimilated peacefully by Ako and by conquest by the Berabe who, it is said, came from Bamum as slaves of the Akuo, and having outnumbered their masters, established themselves at Dumbo Berabe and even extended their land at the expense of the Akuo. At the present time Akuo itself is practically extinct; the few survivors have joined Jeffia, a Quarter of Berabe. Berabe with a population of over 1,000 is the largest and most populous Mbembe village; some of its Quarters are so scattered and distant from their neighbours—2 hours trek—as to constitute separate entities in themselves. The Zembemba are now intergraded in Berabe where they have their own Quarter Head. Like Berabe, Abonkwa is said to be founded by ex-slaves of Akuo from Bamum. (The expression of "slaves" here must be accepted with the greatest reserve).

Mbiribwa is of Tikari origin, being a branch of the Wiya Clan of Wimbun from Kimi which passed there on its way to Konchep. Jama the Konchep chief confirmed this and added that the Mbiribwa chief has all the paraphernalia of a Wimbun chief.

The Ndaka, together with their quarter of Giddan Jukun (a small farming settlement of 14 huts close to the Kentu border) came from Ndaka Bara near Tosso in Kentu. In the main they have Jukun

and Bali-Chamba characteristics and may well be stragglers from the Bali-Chamba group which attempted to settle near Mankon (Bande) but was driven off to Takum (Kabery and Chilver⁸). Support for this is given by Freemantle⁹ who states: "The inhabitants of Takum, Donga and Suntai all come from the Tibati district of Cameroons and migrated at much the same time about 1830, under Fulani pressure from Yola. The Takum people belong to the Tikar tribe, and those of Donga and Suntai to the Chamba Division of the Dinyi tribe".

Buku, Abafu and Ako claim to have come from Wukari, though they are not of Jukun origin, and not from Munchi (Tiv) land as stated by Newton⁷. Another tradition has it that Buku is related to Nama (Neme) which is of Wukari origin by marriage—a Buku man marrying a woman from Neme, now in the Tigon area.

The Legend of Mbia Rock Shelter.

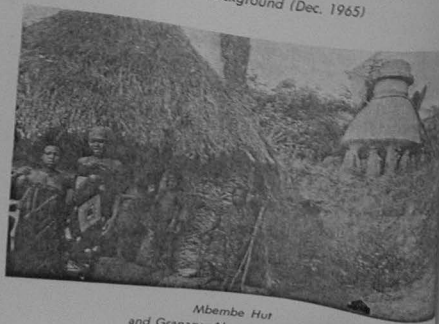
Akwaja the second largest Mbembe village, claims a different origin. According to Newton⁷ it is of Upper Donga or Kaka-Ntem origin. The Warr chief of Moh reiterated the claim that Akwaja came from Mbiribaw (for this reason Akwaja offers sacrifice in Mbot). The Akwaja Chief and other elders emphatically denied being of Kaka origin and while they could not say how, they conceded to being the "brothers" of the Warr group of villages viz. Saa, Jengi (Kungil), Nkambe, Moh, Binju Binshua, Mbot and Warr. They however insisted that the Akwaja, Jeffia (a Quarter of Berabe), Akuo, Mbande, Asha (Assa), Ekuru, Abonshie, Akwesse, Eka and Afu (nearly extinct with one survivor each) and Zembu (nearly extinct with only two survivors) came from the ground of Mbia Cave or rock shelter near Amba village. The following northern Mbembe (Tigon) villages are also said to have originated from the Mbia Cave: Abong, Zhabe, Eneme, Batu, Buru, Eforebe, Zhondo and Ekwechukpo. Mbia Cave is said to be littered with clay pots and other utensils; it is a sacred spot where sacrifices are offered in times of distress e.g. during the small-pox epidemic which devastated Akwaja and led to the scattering of the settlement.

Religious Traditions.

The Mbembe are traditionalists in matters of religion; neither Christianity nor Islam has made deep inroads into the area. Every village has its own sacrificial sacred grove. Fetishes are hung from the ceilings and littered in all corners of living rooms. Amu-



Chief of Akwaja, Mbembe
with wife and daughter
with Bikom Cloth
in background (Dec. 1965)



Mbembe Hut
and Granary, Akwaja (Dec. 1965)

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are worn round the neck and wrists. All these are to ward off bad spirits, for the fear of witchcraft is very strong. The Mbembe also practise divination by the spider; a little pit provided with shelter is dug in front of the hole where the spider lives.

In the old abandoned quarter of Akwaja where the grandfather of the present chief is buried, there is a place for taking oaths. This is a miniature raffia hut beside the village from the roof of which tiny clay pots are hung all round. Underneath the centre of the roof usually lay the skull of an animal. On a nearby stone sacrificial fowls were killed and medicinal herbs were ground. This oath was said to be very powerful and could make people mad.

People are buried beside their huts in a subterranean bed, the foot end being marked by a mound of earth and slabs of stone, one vertical and the other flat on which sacrifices of fowl are made from time to time. As among the Esimbi of Wum Division, the belongings of the deceased are hung or scattered on the grave and not used by living persons.

Succession to the Chieftaincy.

A Chief is succeeded by one of his sons selected by the village elders, immediately the chief dies and before he is buried. The new chief is sworn in at a secret ceremony by the corpse of the deceased chief; he takes an oath to be faithful to the laws and customs of his village in default of which he will die. To round off he partakes of a medicinal drink.

In exceptional circumstances a chief may be succeeded by his brother e.g. in Berabe village blind chief Mbamu of Jeffia Quarter handed over to his brother of Dumbo Berabe Quarter, but Mbamu's voice still carries a lot of weight in the village council.

Occupations.

The economy revolves around the palm oil tree. The principal occupation is the production of palm oil, which made Mbembe land famous and important to the grassfield plateau long before the arrival of the Europeans. The palm oil is bartered or sold in the markets of Nkambe, Binka, Ndu, and even as far afield as Kimbo (Nso) and Misaje. There is also some trade with Wukari-kola being sold there in exchange for Bikom Cloth. The Mbembe, however, have their own home-made cloth made by beating the bark of a tree and producing a soft white material resembling flax which is tied round the waist like a loin cloth.

Marriage.

Formerly there were three types of marriage: by the payment of a bride price or dowry, by the exchange of sisters, and "free" marriages whereby a man and woman lived together without the payment of a bride price—in this case all the children of the union belonged to the family of the woman. Where a dowry was not paid, the woman could walk out on the man at any time. At the present time it is marriage by payment of a bride price which is in vogue. Dowry varies from village to village. In Akwaja it consists of 30 to 40 *Athéphé* (Bikom Cloth from Wukari) each valued at £1 to £2 sterling, 60 *Nyipué* (native hoes imported from Oku in Nso Division) valued at 5/6d. to 14/6d. each, and sometimes some cash—about £15 to £30 sterling. Bikom cloth and hoes are *sine qua non* for marriage to be contracted. In Ako and Berabe the cash required is £20. Afterwards relatives must be entertained with 3 to 4 goats, about 4 chickens, 1 dog (formerly eaten but now only used for making sacrifices), palm wine, palm oil and salt.

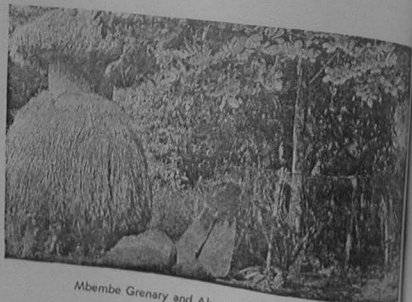
Circumcision of boys takes place at the age of 7 to 8 years. No big camps are held as among the Bebe Jatto and Adere (Mfumte). There is a little feasting with 1 chicken, or 1 goat (according to one's affluence) and palm wine.

Ngah—Native Sunday.

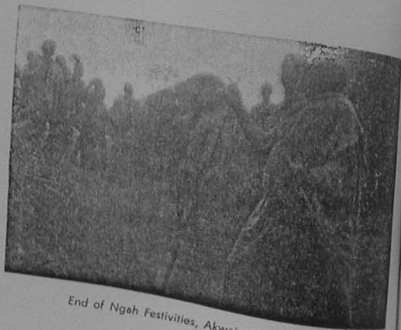
Like the grassfield Cameroonians the Mbembe also have an 8 day week and on their "native Sunday", Ngah, all work is forbidden. In the morning the men go to the bush to tap palm wine. In the afternoon they congregate at the chief's palace with their collections of palm wine. The chief and elders hold court and try to settle minor cases. Then follows the drinking of palm wine by all present—men, women and children—from a pot placed at the centre of the court-yard. Towards sunset there is dancing and mock fighting with shields (made of the bark of a tree) and spears.

Sources of Oral Traditions on the Mbembe.

1. Mpiétheré, Chief of Ako
2. Babong, Chief of Akwesse
3. Mr. Finya of Bari Quarter, Akwaja, President of Mbembe Customary Court at Ako.
4. Chief of Buku.
5. Nseke, Chief of Akwaja.



Mbembe Granary and Akwaja (December 1965)



End of Ngeh Festivities, Akwoja, Mbembe-land

6. Mr. Sylvester Nkika, retired Administrative Messenger, Berabe.
7. Mr. T.E. Shewa, Headmaster, Basel Mission School, Berabe.

4. The 'Misaje' group.

There is, properly speaking, no composite ethnic group called the 'Misaje' which word has only in recent years been applied by the Administration to the diverse peoples who inhabit this district. The name 'Misaje', like most names in the Wimbun area, is derived from the name of the founder of the town of Misaje—formerly an empty land developed by strangers. 'Misaje' was an old man with a white beard who was from the village of Mbissa (Bessah) whom the Hausas, the first strangers, found there on arrival. A common trait of the people of this area is that they tend to be repellant about their ancestral homes and even deny any links with their neighbours for fear that their new-found independence might be jeopardised. But my investigations have confirmed Newton's³ opinion that most of the inhabitants of this area "come from down" (as they put it), from Kentu, but are socially much influenced by the Tikar culture of the Wimbun (Nsungli). The various ethnic groups or sub-groups are:

1. — The Dumbo (Buzumbo).

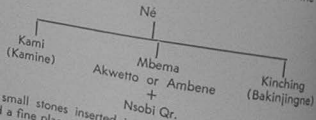
This is the dominant group. The Dumbo at present claim to have always been where they are. Contrary to the Warr claim that the Dumbo came from Mbiribaw, Newton⁷ corroborated by Mbia, the old chief of Kamine, states that the Dumbo came from Kentu. According to oral traditions the father of the Buzumbo was called Kimezung and his wife was Ndefor. The earliest remembered residence, now regarded as sacred, was at Kimezum, a place now over-grown with trees, which is about one mile from the present Dumbo town. An elephant ("Kingengeh") harassed the people and some Buzumbo scattered to many places around. Dumbo waged war against the Jukum of Takum and even carried the war into the opponents' camp. Akawu, the present Chief of Dumbo, states that emigrants from Dumbo founded the 'Bebe' and Nchanti groups of villages, as well as Mbissa (Bessah) village. Only the latter claim is conceded and confirmed by the Warr. Dumbo also claims to have founded the village of Ande in the Mbembe area.

The Dumbo though small were valiant fighters. About their resistance to Fulani invasions, Glauning³ writes:

origin of Beng (Bebin) is unknown—Newton⁷ stated that they are autochthonous.

V. — The Mbissa (Kamine) Group.

Among the Mbissa speaking peoples, Mbissa village as agreed by all the neighbours is of Dumbo origin. On the other hand the Kamine group of village proper viz. Akwetto (Ambene), with its Quarter of Nsobi (Bansobi) and Bajingne (Bakinjingne) spring from Kamine. According to Mbila the old Chief of Kamine, the Kamine group was founded by Né in the old town of Nseh, now a quarter of Kamine village. Nseh lies 1.5 Km. south-west of the Chief's place. Né begot three sons from whom the three principal villages spring.



Three small stones inserted in a circular manner in the ground around a fine place in a sacred grove in the Nseh Quarter of Kamine village marks the former place of residence of the Kamine group. The stones represent the three sons of Né viz. Kami, Mbema and Kinching. It is forbidden to cut down the trees in this grove lest there might be an epidemic. From the time of its inception, Kamine has had 16 Chiefs.

Mbila the old Kamine Chief, who would not be drawn out on this subject on previous visits, confirmed what a Councillor had divulged to me that both Kamine and Dumbo came from Kentu but are not of Tikar or Jukum origin. The old chief would not concede that Kamine and Dumbo are related (this may have been due to the bitter wars which Dumbo, Kamine and Nchanti waged with one another). Talbot¹⁰ quoting District Officer Hunt states that the Bissa (Mbissa) is a branch of the Badzumbo. Né the Kamine ancestor migrated from Kentu because of cramped space and came directly to Nseh, now in Kamine village. The name of Nseh's wife is not remembered as only the male genealogy matters locally. From the time of arrival at their present site, then unoccupied, the Kamine group maintained "brotherly" relations with Tang (Tabenken), Kungi (Warr Clan) and Mbande (Mbembe) with all of whom



KAMINE Dancers

no war was waged; there was active social intercourse—dances, games, etc. were shared.

The Kamine village group is note-worthy for the strict exogamy in vogue there; girls from any of these villages have to be married by men from stranger villages such as Bessah (Mbissa), Mbembe, Nsungli (Wimbun) etc.; likewise all the housewives in these villages are strangers from outside.

In the Misaje area many customs are akin to those of the Wimbun. The social hierarchy is also akin to though on a smaller model, the Wimbun. In Kamine village, for example, there are seven Nji who sit in council with the chief; it is they who select the chief's successor from among his sons. The Kamine chief also has a stool with the black spider motif seen among the Wimbun. Graves of important men are marked with slabs of stone as among the Wimbun and Mbembe. The Né-Nso dance of the Wimbun is also danced by the Kamine and Dumbo; but they wear dresses bearing heavy masks with bold features carved in the likeness of buffaloes, apes, atelopes, etc.—which masks resemble those noted among other autochtones of Central Cameroon like the Zumbi, the Chamba and the Fali.

5. The Mbem (Kaka) and Mfumte.

These inter-related residents of the remite hills of the north-east of Nkambe Division (Nwa Sub-District) are the kith and kin of the Mambila across the Donga; all claim origin from Kimi—a claim contested by the Tikar of the Mbaw Plain. Culturally, the Mbem (or Kaka or Yamba) and the Mfumte are very much akin to one another and the Mbaw Plainsmen. Their society is organised very much like Dumbo and Kamine, a miniature of the Wimbun model. Each village is autonomous, chiefly authority is fluid, sometimes very light. The villages are scattered and thinly populated. The Mbem are the most go-ahead people in the Division; they are very artistic and weave beautiful baskets.

In conclusion: Nkambe Division is composed of a large number of heterogeneous ethnic groups all claiming to have come at different times from Kimi in East Cameroon. These groups have been grafted in places to earlier autochthonous scanty populations of obscure origins, which are mixed pell-mell, especially on the north-western periphery, with Chamba and Jukun element. Although harried by the Fulani from Gashaka especially, these groups managed to maintain their independence until the arrival of the Germans. The predominant cultural influence is Tikar and

"Jagan". The large number of autochthonous populations found scattered in the area under study would indicate that man has been living in these parts for a long time. Archaeology would throw light on this subject.

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