



African Humanities Research  
& Development Circle



Journal of  
**AFRICAN HUMANITIES  
RESEARCH AND  
DEVELOPMENT (JAHRD)**

Volume 1, 2024

Published by The African Humanities  
Research and Development Circle (AHRDC)

## THE EVOLUTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN CENTRAL PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE MƏSHIP, CHAKFEM, AND JIPAL PEOPLES AS MELTING POTS

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### Abstract

This essay examines the evolution of the Məship, Chakfem, and Jipal respectively, as the ethnic identities of their bearers. It contributes to debates on identity formation in the Nigerian nation awash in the sea of heterogeneity. It argues that the formation of ethnic identities in the Jos Plateau area generally, and in the case of these three ethnic groups in particular, is the culmination of various phases in the historical experiences of the peoples from the precolonial through the colonial to the postcolonial eras. Data for this study were gathered from oral interviews conducted mainly in 2022 and secondary materials. Oral interviews were based on semi-structured questions and were conducted ethnic group-by-ethnic group. The interviews and the secondary materials both provided data on the origins of the peoples, their cultures, and historical experiences in mega identity formation. However, while the secondary materials were often framed in forms of debates, the oral interviews were basically descriptive but more detailed. I used basic historical research methodology of descriptive and discursive traditions, as well as thematic cum chronological patterns in presenting the data. The findings show that the Məship, Chakfem, and Jipal respectively, as the ethnic identities are products of the fusion of related groups; while the process of formation of the current identity was completed in the precolonial period for the Jipal; for the Məship and Chakfem, the process was completed in the colonial period.

### Introduction

Plateau State today, with 56 indigenous ethnic nationalities<sup>2</sup> (divided into two major language clusters: Chadic and Benue Congo<sup>3</sup>); is one of the most ethnically diverse states in Nigeria. The literature on the evolution of ethnic identities in Nigeria in general, and the Jos Plateau in particular have largely implicated the colonial period as the springboard. There is some justification for this. In the colonial Plateau Province, for instance, ethnic identities, termed “tribes” were listed and documented. Ames’ list of “principal tribes” in Pankshin, Jos, and Shendam Divisions contains the following: Anaguta, Amap, Birom, Ganawuri, Irigwe, Jerawa, Pakara, Rukuba, Angas (Ngas), Chip, Kaleri, Pai, Pyem, Ron, Sura (Mwaghavul), Tal, Burum,

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) for the National Research Fund (NRF) grant awarded to my team in the 2020 competition cycle. The title of the research is *History from Below: Innovative technologies and the Universal Basic Education Curriculum in Plateau State*. The data for this paper comes from that research.

<sup>2</sup> NRF field Research (2022). Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN) has a list of 59 ethnic groups but on the field, some of these belong to other states or are small clans claiming to be separate ethnic groups.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Blench, “Research on the Plateau Languages of Central Nigeria,” *Afrika Und Übersee: Trilingual Journal of African Languages and Cultures* 93 (2020): 3-34.

Jarawa, Ankwe (Goemai), Bwol, Dimuk (Deomak), Gerkawa (Youm), Jorto, Kanam, Mirriam (Merniyang), Montol, Piapun, and Yergam (Tarok).<sup>4</sup>

Although several ethnic groups were lumped together with the so-called principal ones, based on proximity or language similarity, such classifications were the basis for the creation of administrative units under the indirect rule system of Native Administration. Even with the emergence of Jos as an urban centre in the mid-1910s, with a cosmopolitan demographic outlook, ethnic classifications were used in census data in the 1930s and 1950s. Thus, ethnic groups such as Birom (Berom), Hausa, Nupe, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Tiv, and Kanuri, among others featured in census data.<sup>5</sup>

Plotnicov's study of ethnic associations in Jos city showed the existence and importance of numerous ethnic associations in the lives of migrants to the city since the colonial period, as urban Jos was a colonial phenomenon. According to Plotnicov,

The African himself has a strong attachment to the tribe of his birth, which determines in varying degrees his political and religious affiliations, style of life, occupational and business opportunities, and directions, dress, diet, and other life habits. The Nigerian in Jos cannot conceive that anyone may be both black and detribalized. One is identified by name, facial scars, dress, physiognomy, etc., as belonging to a particular ethnic group.<sup>6</sup>

In Jos city, ethnic associations blossomed and served members' several purposes: bonding through regular scheduled meetings; attending to the welfare of members through support systems during birth, weddings, sickness, death/burial, and through advancing business loans, and settling in new members to adjust to city life; dispensation of justice among members by fining, suspending, or ostracising erring members, as well as settlement of internal disputes among members instead of going to the police or courts; provision of official links in terms of information flow between members and the homeland; promotion of high moral standards by discouraging and punishing shameful acts like prostitution, stealing among members; promotion of local culture through dressing, foods/cuisines, cultural dances/festivals.<sup>7</sup> Logams' study of the Middle Belt Movement among northern minorities in central Nigeria interprets it as a form of ethnic and Christian consciousness to resist the Islam emirate identity posed by the northern establishment. Thus, within Movement's framework were ethnic associations. These included the Tiv Progressive Union in 1938, the Idoma Hope Rising in 1942, the Birom Progressive Union in 1945, and the Yergam Tribal Union in 1952.<sup>8</sup>

But was the colonial period the root of ethnic identities? According to the historian, Bala Usman, the ethnic identities borne by many ethnic nationalities in modern Nigeria emerged in

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<sup>4</sup> See Appendix C, Statistical Population in C. G. Ames, *Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria: The Highland Chieftaincies* (London: Franc Cass, 1934), 347-348.

<sup>5</sup> Leonard Plotnicov, *Strangers to the City: Urban Man in Jos* (Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), 62-63.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 66-80.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Chunun Logams, *The Middle Belt Movement in Nigerian Political Development: A Study in Political Identity, 1949-1967* (Abuja: Centre for Middle Belt Studies, 2004), 369.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Before then, he argues, the various peoples were identified with the names of their villages or towns and that migrations and intermingling led to the fusion of peoples.<sup>9</sup> Bala Usman and others elaborate this general theory on the formation of ethnic nationalities in Plateau State whom they tagged “Settlers on the Jos Plateau,” claimed to be composed of fusion of migrants from other places outside the region.<sup>10</sup> Fwatshak has, however, argued that this general theory is only partially valid. It is valid to the extent that many Jos Plateau groups are products of mergers of two or more but closely related groups. However, it is invalid to the following extents. First, there are autochthonous groups whose tradition of origin point to their current habitat or somewhere very close. Second, migration and intermingling, including inter-marriage alone was not a sole factor in the formation of ethnic identities in patrilineal societies including those on the Jos Plateau. Third, while ethnic consciousness may be a colonial phenomenon, the factors for the formation of ethnic identities had existed prior to colonialism.<sup>11</sup> Indeed such factors include commonality of language, patterns of behaviour, economic, social, religious, and political cultures, as well as territorial contiguity. Going forward, a consideration of various factors would prove more useful than monocausality in uncovering how ethnic identities crystalized among the various ethnic groups under review. In the sections that follow, I outline the historical phases in the evolution of the Məship, Chakfem, and Jipal respectively, as the ethnic identities of their bearers, starting with the Məship.

### **Evolution of Məship as an Ethnic Identity**

Məship is the name of the ethnic group and language spoken by the bearers of that identity. Məship, as ethnic group is serial number 39 on the 2017 revised list of ethnic groups in Plateau State appearing with the spelling Miship.<sup>12</sup> It is serial number 30 in an earlier list issued in 2010, spelled as Miship.<sup>13</sup> Məship land (called Chip in official documents), is in Pankshin Local Government Area of Plateau State. Its immediate neighbours include Garram to the northeast, Tal to the east, Kofiar to the southwest, and Mupun to the northwest.

The Məship identity is the product of several years of historical and orthographic transformation or changes due to internal developments and external influences. In the pre-colonial period, clan identities were in vogue. Colonialism brought a unified identity, called “Chip”, which became the official name of the people and their land, named Chip District. On the other hand, the people called themselves Mhiship. The linguist, Roger Blench, amended the spelling of name to Miship. In 2021, a Language Literacy and Language Development Committee of the people, developed an orthography for the language and Məship was officially

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<sup>9</sup> For details, see the following works by Yusufu Bala Usman: “The Formation of the Nigerian Economy and Polity,” in *Nigeria: State of the Nation and the Way Forward*, eds. Abdullahi Mahdi, George Amale Kwanashie, and Alhaji Mahmood Yakubu (Kaduna: Arewa House, 1994), 40-42; “History and the Challenges to the Peoples and Politics of Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” Paper presented at the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria held at the University of Abuja (November 22, 1999).

<sup>10</sup> Bala Usman, Shaba Jimada, and Barira Mohammed, “Settlers on the Jos Plateau,” *Analysis Magazine* 4, no. 3 (2004): 8-13.

<sup>11</sup> S. U. Fwatshak, “Reconstructing the Origins of the Peoples of Plateau State: Questioning the ‘We are All Settlers’ Theory,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 16 (2005/2006), 112-140.

<sup>12</sup> “Plateau State Autochthonous (Indigenous) Ethnic Groups, 22 March 2017.” The list is in pdf format and the soft copy was supplied to me by its then President, Professor Aboi Madaki of the University of Jos in January 2022. The list appeared in an earlier publication by the Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN) entitled, *The History, Ownership, Establishment of Jos and Misconceptions about Recurrent Jos Conflicts* (Jos: Dan-Sil Press, 2010), v.

<sup>13</sup> Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN), *The History, Ownership, Establishment*, v.

adopted as the new spelling of the ethnic and language name, while the meaningless “Chip” was abolished.<sup>14</sup> The historical process of evolution of the people as an ethnic category involves migration, settlement in a contiguous geographical space, state formation, and colonialism.

### **Migration, Settlement Patterns, and the Formation of Clan Identity**

In the corpus of literature on the Məship, including oral literature, migration is shown to be one of the processes of the formation of the people. In propounding the migration theory, colonial anthropologist, C. G. Ames, credits Dawar, an Ngas migrant from Garram, with founding Chip. In his words, “Chip was founded by an Angas man called Dawar and his family, and probably some friends and adherents. Dawar, who was a son of the ruling house in Garram had three sons, Dazan, Talam, and Samlam, Dazan being the eldest.”<sup>15</sup> Ames’ narrative further states that, “Garam became a large and powerful town and from it went forth the stock who became the Chip tribe, while from Chip another branch became the Jorto tribe, and another, the Ankwei tribe.”<sup>16</sup> However, the Dawar legend sounds like the Bayyidda, Tsoede, Oduduwa legends in Hausa, Nupe, and Yoruba histories. These legends suggest that the respective figures were responsible for the formation of the respective ethnic groups. However, historians have disputed such claims pointing to earlier inhabitants of the lands that these so-called heroes “founded.”

While debating Ames’ Dawar narrative in the Məship case, Dafwang supports the migration story but argues that, some Məship people are not descendants Dawar<sup>17</sup> (Ngas stock) that migrated from Garam into Məship territory<sup>18</sup> and that, “Dwar could not have been the founder of Chip...the Longmaar and the Jibam are the founders of the territory that became Chip.”<sup>19</sup> The import of this debate is that Məship people were formed from an amalgam of different (but related) groups that migrated into and settled in the territory that constitutes Məship land today. The traditions of origin of the various clans of Məship people, as well as initial settlement patterns, and titles of traditional rulers amply demonstrate the significance of clan identity, as the earliest form of group identity among the people. Məship people have twenty-six clans all of whom claim origin from Borno, coming in various waves of migration, and entering Məship land from various places within the Jos Plateau and adjoining lowlands. Their entries into what became Məship land can be classified into those associated with Garram (Ngas land), those associated with Dai (Mwaghavul land), those associated with Jel bang Mudut (Gomei land), those associated with present day Taraba State, and several others.

Let me briefly describe these. Twelve<sup>20</sup> of the twenty-six clans mention Garram as one of their important stop-overs. Of these only two clans migrated directly from Garram to Məship land. These are the Dimwai clan related to Dawar (Dwar) (they first settled at Kwala before moving to Dimwai) and the Jep Niyal that moved from Garram to Kopshak (led by Tallang) and later to Jep Niyal. Like the Jep Niyal, the other ten clans are not related to Dawar (Dwar). They

<sup>14</sup> Istifanus Ishaku Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar in Məship Land from Earliest Times* (n.p., 2022), iv, 25, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Ames, *Gazetteers*, 146.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Spelt consistently Dwar by Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>20</sup> These are the Jep Milit, Jep Mijit, Jep Niyal, Jep Midiyel, Kop Kuleng, Dimwai, Poekongship, Gang’es, Kopkwal, Irchip, and Shipang.

moved from Garram through several other places before coming to Məship land. For example, the Jep Mijit clan arrived Məship from Jelbang Mudut; the Jep Midiyel arrived Jibam from Jipal.<sup>21</sup>

Of the other clans that have no relationship with Garram in their migration narratives, four clans<sup>22</sup> mention Gang Dai (Dai) as one of their major stops over. Dai is in present day Mwaghavul land; the Mundung and Merdin mention Mangun (also in Mwaghavul land); the Kopmoldohom section of Minting clan mentions Jelbang Mudut as its major stop-over; the Kwala clan associates itself with Kabwir (Ngasland and Gung near Lankan); Kopshakap clan associates itself with Kabwir-Ner-Dene-Berek; two sections<sup>23</sup> of the Minting clan claim that their ancestors first settled at Ner before moving to Minting; the Kopninkop section of Minting first settled at Tingkus, next Dimwai; while the Koptilim section first settled at Kwang in Quan Pan. Others are the Daboshu clan that first settled at Kofiar; Tal-Buzuk first settled at Pai; Jikon, Liblang, Kopdihit, Bakwar that first settled in what is present day Taraba State before coming to the lowlands adjoining the Jos Plateau.<sup>24</sup>

In the course of their migrations, each clan or some sections of it was/were led by one or more leaders at one point or the other to their present location. For example, while Kopdah was identified as the first leader of the Jep Milit, Dakup Ngyak was the one who finally brought them to their present location. Kosen, however, was said to have led the Jep Midiyel throughout their migrations until they arrived their present location. Dawar (Dwar) similarly led the Dimwai group from Garram. Jel led the Pyabor and Kapil clans from Asa to their present locations. Mwangang led the Jibam clan from Dai to Gonkat (Miship land).<sup>25</sup>

Initial founding and patterns of settlements were clan-based and this was the outlook. Kwala clan first settled at Kwala when they arrived from Gung, while the Jep Mijit that arrived directly from Jelbang Mudut settled at Jep Mijit. The Jep Milit that came directly from Tangdyel settled at Jep Milit, while the Shipang that arrived from Panlat settled at Larpiya. The Kopshakap came directly from Berek and settled at Kuluk ning, while the Jepmidiyel that arrived directly from Kopkwal settled at Jepmidiyel. Pyabor that came directly from Asa settled at Pyabor, while Kopkuleng arriving directly from Kurmi (Lankan) settled at Kopkuleng. Minzam that came directly from Zari settled at Minzam, while Kapil came immediately from Kapil section of Lankan first to Pangnaship then to settled permanently at Kapil section of Chip. Dimwai arrived directly from Garram and first settled at Kwala before moving to Dimwai. The various sections of Minting arrived from different places to settle in their present locations. For example, the Kopninkop section came directly from Tingkus to Dimwai; the Koptilim section came from Lar directly to Minting; the Kopmoldohom section moved directly from Soklut to Minting; and the Mindreng section came directly from Ner. Poekongship clan came directly from Kurum and settled at Poekongship, while the Gan'es that came directly from Wadu settled at Gan'es. The Daboshu that came directly from Kofiar settled at Jikon, while the Mundung that came directly from Mangun settled at Mundung. The Kopkwal came directly from Jibam and settled at Damkor, while the Merdin came directly from Jipal and first settled at Mel before moving to Merdin. The Tal-Buzuk came directly from Kopzak and settled at Tal-Buzuk, while the Jikon that came directly from Jipal settled at Jikon. The Kopdihit came directly from Nba'al and settled at

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<sup>21</sup> Focus Group Discussion with 286 people of Məship origin at Chip Kwala, Pankshin LGA, 5 March, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> Pyabor, Minzam, Kapil, and Jibam.

<sup>23</sup> Miler and Mindreng.

<sup>24</sup> FGD cited.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Kopdihit (in Longkat), while the Bakwar that arrived from Nba'al settled at Kopdis. The Liblang came directly from Longwoo Nbaal and settled at Liblang, while the Irchip came directly Jipari (Lankan) and settled at Irchip. The Jibam arrived directly from Guza and first settled at Pang na chip and finally at Jibam. The Jep Niyal came directly from Kopshak (led by Tallang) to Jep Niyal.<sup>26</sup> In respect of titles of their clan traditional rulers, the outlook is presented in table 1 below.

Clan Name	Title of Traditional Ruler
Jep Milit, Jep Mijit, Gan'es, Pyabor, Liblang, Bakwar	Nuwang/Nhiwang
Shipang, Minzam, Khidom/Kapil, <i>Merdin</i> Mundung	Mishkaham
Jep Niyal & Kopshakap	Khanteer
Jep Midiyel	Sihman
Dimwai	Nhisen
Kwala & Poekongship	Nhikir
Kopkwal, Irchip	Dinpang/Dirpang
Jibam	Long-Ngoht
Kwala	Nhikhir
Kopshakap	Khanteer
<i>Minting</i>	Dangrap
Daboshu	Khinsai
Tal-Buzuk	Dangyel
Jikon	Kurpang
Kopdihit	Kawap

Table 1: Names of clans and the titles of their traditional rulers in Məship land. Source: compiled by author from Məship interview, 2022

What the migration, settlement, and kingship data suggest is that the clan was the basis of identity in the early period.

An attempt at state formation was begun by the Longmaar group of clans. This they did by establishing the Longmaar confederacy<sup>27</sup> governed under a tripartite structure (*Tangrəknakun*, TNK). The TNK comprised *Newang* Pyabor, *Mishkaham Kədoghom*, and *Mishkaham* Kopshibet.<sup>28</sup> But even at that, the differences in the titles of the traditional rulers suggests, some degree of autonomy within the confederacy. Moreover, the Longmaar were not empire builders and lacked any influence over the others; similarly, the non-Longmaar groups did not colonize one another or any of the Longmaar confederacy members. The prevalent clan identity therefore subsisted throughout the precolonial period, as identities such as Jibam, Kwala, Jep Mijit, Jep Milit, to mention but a few clans, remained dominant.<sup>29</sup> Despite the dominance of clan identity, many patterns of uniform identity cutting across the different clans emerged among the people long before colonial rule. These were language, marriage system, the traditional religion (*Kum*), rites of passage, and cultural dances, among others.<sup>30</sup> How this happened remains unknown.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> These are the Pyabor, Kopkuleng, Kapil, Mues, Jibam on the Dai side; the Jep Midiyel, Jikon, Pikongshik (on the Kofiar/Jipal side). See Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, 31

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 6 of Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*.

<sup>29</sup> FGD cited.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. See also chapter of five of Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*.

### **Colonialism and the Chip/Mhiship/Məship Identity**

In line with their indirect rule system and political centralization strategy, British colonialists merged all the clans and their villages, into one administrative unit and named the new administrative area Chip District. By the early 1930s, the population of Chip District was 10,360 and this included descendants of Tal emigrants who settled to the west of the Chip valley. These are “often referred to as the Jepak sub-tribe...”<sup>31</sup> According to Dafwang, Chip has “no meaning in the Məship language” and that the people called themselves Mhiship. Nevertheless, that name Chip stuck as the ethnic, language, and territorial name for the people, their language, and territory.<sup>32</sup>

The British classified Chip as a “tribe”, separate from but close to the Ngas in some respects. Accordingly, “the Chip tribe have evolved a dialect of the Angas language of their own and have given up the use of the Angas tribal mark.”<sup>33</sup> However, the cultural influences of their neighbours were borne by similarities with the Ngas and Gomei in “their religion, their dodos, their dances, their social customs and organisation, and their houses.”<sup>34</sup>

Two quick points need clarification at this point. First, why the British named the people and their land Chip. This was a general problem all over the Plateau Province. As noted by Isichei, each place in Plateau State has two names: a native name and a Hausa name. For example, Ankwei was used for the Gomei, Sura for the Mwaghavul, Angas for the Ngas.<sup>35</sup> What this suggests is that Chip, might have been a mispronunciation of Mhiship/Miship/Məship. Be that as it may, colonialism consolidated the Chip identity by creating Chip District along with other Districts in Pankshin Division in 1934. The head of the Jep Niyal clan<sup>36</sup> was appointed the District Head and therefore the overall head of all the other clans under Chip District. Some of the other clans became villages and their heads, village heads. Like other colonial districts, Chip District had a Native Court Grade D (with the District Head as president), a Scribe, and the District Head had personal body guards (Hausa, *dogarai*). Native law and customs including marriage and divorce were to be handled at the native court. The District Head was responsible for tax assessment and collection all over the district and to hand over the proceeds to the Pankshin Division authorities. He was also responsible for labour mobilisation for the Public Works Department to build physical infrastructure like roads and for expatriate mining companies exploiting tin in the Jos-Bukuru axis. By these practices of centralisation at the local level, ethnic consciousness increased, elaborated, and became consolidated.

Since colonialism, outsiders still identify the people and their land as Chip, despite the fact that the people call themselves Mhiship/Miship/Məship (lit: relations disperse).<sup>37</sup> The implication of this is the dual identity the land and people bear: the colonial Chip, which the land has continued to be officially named,<sup>38</sup> and the indigenous Mhiship/Miship/Məship, Məship

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<sup>31</sup> Ames, *Gazetteers*, 125.

<sup>32</sup> Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, iv, 1, 25, 54.

<sup>33</sup> Ames, *Gazetteers*, 147.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Studies in the History of Plateau State, Nigeria* (London: Longman, 1981).

<sup>36</sup> Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, 103-104.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, iv, 25, 54.

<sup>38</sup> A letter from the paramount ruler, the *Long Mbiship* dated 30-7-2020 and addressed to Professor Istifanus Dafwang has the official letter head and stamp of the traditional ruler as *Long Mbiship*, Chip District. See copy of the letter in Istifanus Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, 85.



adopted in 2021, when the Language Literacy and Language Development Committee of the people, developed an orthography for the language.<sup>39</sup>

### **The Evolution Migrations and Early Settlement Patterns of Chakfem Identity**

Chakfem is the name of the people, language, and territory that go by that name. Chakfem land is in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State. Its neighbours are the Mangun, Jipal in Mangu Local Government Area (LGA), as well as the Mushere in Bokkos LGA. During the colonial demographic exercise of the 1930s, Chakfem was counted as part of the Mwaghavul, then called Sura. As an ethnic group, Chakfem is serial number 15 on the 2017 revised list of ethnic groups in Plateau State.<sup>40</sup> It is serial number 12 in the list issued in 2010.<sup>41</sup> Chakfem as a territorial name was long established before colonial rule and has remained unchanged. However, as an ethnic identity, it is a product of historical processes going back before the era of British colonialism. Like in the case of the Məship, migrations and settlement patterns, British colonial rule, and postcolonial political developments have shaped the process.

Datok has argued that Chakfem people are of the Mwaghavul stock that migrated from Gung. In his own words, “the founders of Chakfem were believed to have come from Gung like the other Mwaghavul groups, to settle in their present location.”<sup>42</sup> This suggests that they are a homogeneous group and have no separate identity. However, Yearwood describes the Chakfem and the Jipal as distinct peoples though closely related to the Mwaghavul.<sup>43</sup> Yearwood’s position is confirmed by narratives of Chakfem migration and early settlement patterns both of which show that they were formed from the amalgamation of different but related migrants and autochthones, as elaborated below.

Chakfem land and people comprises ten (10) clans: Formto, Kopdok, Gurumtal, Luhutben, Mwhafin, Pangde, Kopbulung, Nakop, Amko, and Jidong. Based on the oral testimonies of Chakfem informants, Chakfem land has two major categories of inhabitants; clans that migrated from somewhere and one that is autochthonous.

Those clans that migrated from somewhere are the Formto, Kopdok, Gurumtal, Luhutben, Mwhafin, Pangde, Nakop, and Amko. All these clans claim that their ancestors migrated from Borno but while some say they passed through Bauchi and Gung (in Pankshin),<sup>44</sup> one clan (the Mwhafin clan) say they moved from Borno straight to Shere in Wamba (present day Nasarawa State) before returning to the Plateau through Mushere from where they moved and settled at Tim (Chakfem land).<sup>45</sup> There is no clarity as to whether the clans that settled at one time or the other at Gung arrived Gung in one wave of migration or not. However, it is quite clear that such clans did not arrive Chakfem land under one leader, nor in one migration wave; rather each had its leader, as some clans passed through other places before arriving their present location. Thus, the Formto clan was led from Gung by Dagong to Jiben where they first settled in Chakfem land after passing through Sompak. Similarly, the Luhutben clan arrived and first

<sup>39</sup> Dafwang, *The History of Longmaar*, iv, 25, 54.

<sup>40</sup> “Plateau State Autochthonous (Indigenous) Ethnic Groups, 22 march 2017.”

<sup>41</sup> Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN), *The History, Ownership, Establishment*, v.

<sup>42</sup> Polycarp F. Datok, *A Short History of Sura (Panyam), 1730-1981* (Jos: NBTT, 1981), 65.

<sup>43</sup> Peter J. Yearwood, “The Mwaghavul, Mupun, Njak, and Ngas: An Introduction to their Oral History,” in *Jos Oral History and Literature Texts* Vol. 1. ed., Peter J. Yearwood (Jos: Department of History, 1981), viii, xvii.

<sup>44</sup> These are the Formto, Kopdok, Gurumtal, Luhutben, Pangde, Nakop, Amko clans.

<sup>45</sup> Focus Group Discussion with 20 community members from Chakfem at Tim (Chakfem headquarters), 13 May, 2022.

settled at Kopjan in Chakfem land after passing through Kopjan in Mupun land. Their leader was Dadyang. The Pangde clan was led by Za'ah from Gung to Till in Mupun land and finally to Kopang where they first settled in Chakfem. The Nakop clan was led from Gung by Katlemen to Fungor (in present day Quan Pan) and finally to Jelem where they first settled in Chakfem land. The Amko clan had a longer sojourn; led by Khidwa, they left Gung for Mupun land, then Bwonpe; next they moved to Nyemdung (in Mangun), then to Nahoros and finally settled at Mudihin in Chakfem land. Bapkyes led the Kopdok clan from Gung direct to Tim in Chakfem land. Similarly, Putna led the Gurumtal clan from Gung direct to Nahoros in Chakfem land.<sup>46</sup>

Before the arrival of the migrants, there was the autochthonous clan: the Kopbulung clan. According to their oral traditions, the ancestors of the Kopbulung clan were two persons: male and female who emerged from the ground. They later married themselves and birthed *Jan* (twins). The twins later separated, as one went to Namu while the other stayed close by at Kopfer and is the progenitor of the Kopbulung clan. The founder of the Kopbulung clan later moved down the hills to Shidong (in present day Quanpan LGA). From there, the Kopbulung clan moved to Jiblang, their present location in Chakfem land. During the course of their movements, down and up the hills, they were led at one time or the other by Koplant, Makdling, and Da'agel.<sup>47</sup>

What can be deduced from these migration and settlement stories is the fact that, Chakfem identity did not exist at the early stages of the migration and settlement of the clans in their sections. Clan identity might have been the order of the day in these early periods, however, group consciousness evolved in the process of interaction among the clans. With a majority of the groups claiming to have stayed at one time or the other at Gung, such groups may have become acquainted with one another and then developed kinship relations.

The Chakfem identity developed in the precolonial period through various processes including a common language, common social customs of marriage and rites of passage, common religion, common economic systems, and the evolution of a centralised political institution, among others. In terms of language, Chakfem, a variant of Mwaghavul was developed. Both those that claim they came from Gung and those that claim autochthony are Chadic speakers. All dialects of the Chadic language on the Jos Plateau and adjoining lowlands are mutually intelligible. Besides language, were other forms of uniform identity. In terms of social customs, marriage systems and rites, passage rites like birth, death, and burial, among others were developed along the lines of those of the Mwaghavul and other kith and kin including neighbours. Similarly, the traditional religion *Kum*, as was the practice of farming as the dominant economic activity followed those of the Mwaghavul and other neighbours.<sup>48</sup> In addition, they jointly fought external enemies such as the Jipal and the Mwaghavul of Mangun.<sup>49</sup> When the migrants and the autochthones developed these common identities is lost in memory.

It is also not clear how and when the *Mishkalam* institution evolved as a central political institution among the Chakfem. However this happened, the *Mishkalam* lived at Tim in Chakfem. Each village had its *Mishkalam* for example, *Mishkalam Kum* Jiben, *Mishkalam Kum* Nahoros, *Mishkalam Kum* Jiblang, and *Mishkalam Kum* Muko. Nevertheless, they recognised the authority

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> However, they did not develop or build any empire by conquering any of their neighbours, neither were they conquered by their neighbours.

of the central *Mishkabam* at Tim and controlled only affairs in their localities.<sup>50</sup> The centralised political structure that birthed the *Mishkabam* institution saw the emergence of Byangreng as the first *Mishkabam* Chakfem. The second, Shwarcan was ruling when the British conquerors came in 1907.<sup>51</sup> H.R.H *Mishkabam* Raymond Yonbis Sereplua is the current *Mishkabam* and the 11<sup>th</sup> on the kinglist of Chakfem.<sup>52</sup> The evolution of a central authority figure/chief among the Chakfem no doubt enhanced the process of ethnic identity creation.

### Colonialism and the Sura Identity of the Chakfem

During the 1930s, Chakfem was categorized as part of “South Sura” District along with Ampang West, Kerang, Mangun, and Jipal.<sup>53</sup> In this respect, and under the South Sura District arrangement, the traditional ruler of the Chakfem, *Mishkabam* Tupshak was made one of the Judges of the Sura District Native Court.<sup>54</sup> How the British came to classify Chakfem as Sura is not clear but they firmly believed that the Chakfem were Mwaghavul and treated them as such. Perhaps this might have been because of the fact that a majority of the Chakfem clans claim origin from Ngung like many other Mwaghavul and that the Chakfem unified patterns of religion, customs, economy, and kingship were the same as those of the Mwaghavul. If the classification of Chakfem was a mistake, it was not an isolated case. Indeed, the colonial regime made a lot of assumptions pertaining to the ethnic identities of various ethnic groups in the Plateau Province. For example, due to close proximity to the Ngas, the Mupun, Fier, Kadung, Tal, among others in Pankshin Division were classified as Hill Angas (Ngas people occupying the hills).<sup>55</sup> According to Foulkes, “The names of towns and kings, spirits and religious ceremonies are incidentally the same among the Angass, suras, Lankan, Chip, and Thal...”<sup>56</sup> Even the Mwaghavul language (and perhaps the people) was regarded as originally Ngas. Accordingly, “The Sura language itself is a dialect or derivation from the Angas language.”<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the Mwaghavul had an enormous influence on their neighbours, just as some of their neighbours influenced them. For the Chakfem Mwaghavul influence was continuous since the precolonial period. In the precolonial period, such influences included language, social, economic, and religious practices, as well as the *Mishkabam* institution at the political level. During the colonial period, the Chakfem were made part of South Sura District placing it under the authority of Panyam; Christianity of the dominant Sudan United Mission (SUM) denomination came through Panyam.<sup>58</sup>

### Postcolonial Political Processes and Chakfem Identity

Western education which the Church pioneered came with the Mwaghavul who also served as pioneer teachers. In the post-colonial period, Chakfem has always been under Mangu Local Government, created in 1976, with the Mwaghavul in demographic control.<sup>59</sup> However, with a

<sup>50</sup> Chakfem FGD, cited.

<sup>51</sup> Datok, *A Short History of Sura*, 65.

<sup>52</sup> Chakfem FGD, cited.

<sup>53</sup> Datok, *A Short History*, 26.

<sup>54</sup> Chakfem FGD, cited.

<sup>55</sup> Ames, *Gazetteers*, 124.

<sup>56</sup> H. O. Foulkes, “Some Preliminary Notes on the Angass” (1907), cited in Yearwood, *Jos Oral History*, i.

<sup>57</sup> Ames, *Gazetteers*, 151.

<sup>58</sup> Chakfem FGD, cited.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

bourgeoning educated elite in politics and in government, in the judiciary and in the civil service, the Chakfem identity has blossomed. At the administrative level, Fwanyil became the first district head of Chakfem. But what gave more teeth to Chakfem identity as separate from Mwaghavul was the creation of Chakfem chiefdom in first in 2005 then in 2006<sup>60</sup> by the Governor Joshua C. Dariye administration (1999-2007). His Royal Highness Raymond Yonbish became the first Mishkaham Chakfem chiefdom. Governor Jonah Jang's administration (2007-2015) in 2007 set aside all the chiefdoms, districts, and village areas created by the Dariye administration. When his administration created new ones in May 2015, Chakfem chiefdom was not restored. However, Governor Simon B. Lalong (2015-2023) restored it in 2019.<sup>61</sup> As stated earlier, Chakfem has consistently appeared as an ethnic group in the PIDAN list showing it can no longer be classified as Mwaghavul.

### **The Evolution of the Jipal Identity**

Jipal is both the name of a people, their language and the territorial area that bear that name. Jipal informants say that the word Jipal comes from a combination of two words: *ji* (come) and *pal* (fall/collapse). According to them, the meaning of Jipal is that visitors to their land who come with bad intentions would always fail.<sup>62</sup> Jipal land is located in the southern part of Mangu LGA of Plateau State. Its neighbours are the Māship of Chip District (in Pankshin LGA), the Pan people such as Kwalla and Doemak (in Quan Pan LGA), the Mupun of Tokbet and Sihin (in Pankshin LGA), the Mangun, Ampang West, and Chakfem respectively in Mangu LGA. The Jipal language belongs to the Kofiar cluster which includes Goemai, Doemak, Merniang, Kwalla, Bwall, Jipal, all of which are closely related.<sup>63</sup> Jipal as a territory and group identity was long established before colonial rule. During the colonial demographic exercise of the 1930s, Jipal was counted as part of the Mwaghavul, then called Sura. As an ethnic group, Jipal is serial number 28 on the 2017 revised list of ethnic groups in Plateau State.<sup>64</sup> It is serial number 21 in the list issued in 2010.<sup>65</sup> The process of formation of the Jipal ethnic identity, goes back to the precolonial period and is rooted in migrations and settlement patterns, socio-economic unification and political centralization; British colonial rule, and post-colonial political processes.

### **Migrations and Early Settlement Patterns**

Like most Plateau culture groups, the Jipal claim origin from various short and long-distance migration stories. The short-distance migration history also has two or more versions. The first is held by the Kofiar and Jipal clans. They claim that their ancestors emerged from the ground in Bum del chor hills (west of Pangkurum hill in present day Shendam LGA) and that a fatal natural disaster which occurred there (i.e. Bum del chor hills)<sup>66</sup> left only two survivors—Paya and Nade who were male and female respectively. The survivors escaped to Kofiar,<sup>67</sup> got married, and had six children whose descendants founded the Jipal and Kofiar.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The 2005 creation of chiefdoms, districts, and village areas was nullified by a court of law for not following due process, hence the government had to do it again in 2006.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Focus Group Discussion with 10 community members at Jipal. Provide the necessary details.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Yearwood, *Jos Oral History*, xxi.

<sup>64</sup> "Plateau State Autochthonous (Indigenous) Ethnic Groups, 22 march 2017."

<sup>65</sup> Plateau Indigenous Development Association Network (PIDAN), *The History, Ownership, Establishment*, v.

<sup>66</sup> The type/name of the natural disaster and the date of its occurrence are both lost in memory.

<sup>67</sup> A short form of *kop ni ba fiar* (meaning, the family line must continue to multiply)

<sup>68</sup> Jipal FGD cited.

The narrative goes further to say that, those that occupied Jipal area experienced population growth and founded many villages such as Zuwahal, Male, Kwa, Bu, Kaper, Rundum, Kaburuk, Katul, Kabim, and Kanjing.<sup>69</sup> Nyekung, one of the sons of Kofiar and his two brothers, Jwangvil and Mangurum were credited with the founding of old Rundum. Nyekung was also credited with the founding of Kaper and establishing the Beyahal clan after leaving old Rundum. Jwangvil is recognised as the founder of Kaburuk after he left old Rundum. Similarly, Mangurum was said to have established new Rundum after leaving old Rundum.<sup>70</sup>

The second version of the short-distance migration history is promoted by the Misham, Sabonglek, and Dankong clans. According to their tradition of origin, their forefathers migrated from Tal, through Chip and Jakning (Dokan Kasuwa) and first settled at Kwa and Misham (north of Kwa). They split at Misham, as some went to Manden near Pes in Chakfem. They are called *Manden Kop Misham*, that is, descendants of Misham. The Sabonglek clan, however, says that its forefathers left Misham to Sabonglek and split there with some going to Kaper where they founded the Mudel clan. The Dankong clan belief that their forefather had three sons and was forced to leave Sabonglek due to a natural disaster. The first was Kopkudi (the seed is remaining/surviving), founder of Kanjing (northwest of Kaper). The second son was Kilingmut (enemies will think that the seed is dead/destroyed), who founded Tuhunkyel (Kabim). As the population increased, Kilingmut left part of his family behind at Tuhunkyel (Kabim) and relocated to Ngwa. He also later left Ngwa and resettled at Bwonpe in Mwaghavul land. Yilfwom.<sup>71</sup> The third son, left Sabonglek for Shiagurum. Increasing population in the new settlement also forced him to move. He founded a new settlement at Katul on the border with Mupun lands of Tokbet and Sihin.<sup>72</sup>

The long-distance version claims that the Kofiar and Jipal groups migrated from Borno along with several others such as the Tal, Paipung, Kaneom, Montol, Taroh, Mwaghavul, Ngas, Goemai, Mupun, and Ron, but that they later separated at some points from some of the groups while continuing with the Mwaghavul, Ngas, Goemai, Mupun, and Ron. They arrived at their present location in the seventeenth century.<sup>73</sup> Unlike the versions claiming short distance migrations, appropriated by the various clans, the long-distance theory is not appropriated by any clan. However, as can be seen from the narratives of the various clans, even the short-distance histories do not claim a single source of origin for all the Jipal; rather, there are the Bum-del-chor groups and the Tal group, suggesting that the Jipal identity was formed from an amalgamation of different but related Chadic-speaking groups. Be that as it may, before the era of British colonialism, the people had developed a common language, customs, rites of passage, marriage system, traditional religion and a centralized political structure, among other markers of unification and shared identity.

The Jipal language is Chadic and mutually intelligible with her close and distant neighbours in the Chadic cluster on the Jos Plateau and adjoining lowlands including Məship, Chakfem, Mwaghavul, Mupun, Goemai, among others. Similarly, Jipal customs, marriage system, rites of

<sup>69</sup> These villages were amalgamated by the British to form Jipal federated District in 1935.

<sup>70</sup> Jipal FGD cited.

<sup>71</sup> Full name is *Mwo kikat kop ni ape fwohi*, the enemies might be deceived into believing that his settlement can easily be looted.

<sup>72</sup> Jipal FGD cited.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

the passage, and traditional religion are similar to those of their neighbours, especially the Mwaghavul and Mupun. At the level of political authority, the principal ruler was called *Mishkabam* like the Mwaghavul, as each clan/village also had a *Mishkabam* of that clan/village. The *Mishkabam* was the eldest man in clan. Over time, the people created a central chieftaincy for the whole Jipal. The emergence of the *Mishkabam* Jipal was arrived at through a cooking competition. The sons of Barse were selected to participate in the competition. The successful person must prove his ability to feed large numbers of people with food and drinks, as well as his leadership ability. Beyaghal, the first son of Barse, was the first to go through the competition, but he failed after many chances to feed the people. The next Kopzo who succeeded after three trials and became *Mishkabam* Jipal.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Colonial Era and the Sura Identity of the Jipal**

Jongsopot was the *Mishkabam* Jipal when the British colonial troops arrived.<sup>75</sup> The British classified Jipal as Sura (Mwaghavul), placing it in the South Sura District along with Ampang West, Kerang, Mangun, Chakfem.<sup>76</sup> The Mwaghavul influence on Jipal was already pervasive including its religious beliefs and practices. Christianity first came to Jipal from the Mwaghavul land of Panyam in the 1940s. The Sudan United Mission opened a station at Kaper in 1941. Daniel Lot from Panyam was the first evangelist. Job Davem, also a Mwaghavul man and A. Jar started the Katul and Rundum stations in 1943 and 1945 respectively.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps these are the reasons why Datok regarded the Jipal also as Mwaghavul.

### **Post Colonial Developments**

In 2018, during the reign of Josiah Dewan Jongshwan (who ascended the throne in 1984 as the 14<sup>th</sup> *Mishkabam* Jipal), the Jipal chieftaincy stool was upgraded to Second class status<sup>78</sup> by the Governor Simon Bako Lalong administration (2015-2023) and the title of the stool was changed to *Long* Jipal.<sup>79</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The formation of the Məship, Chakfem, and Jipal ethnic identities was the culmination of historical experiences shaped by migration, the development of a common language, and social, economic, religious, and political institutions. Among the Məship, clan identities persisted throughout the precolonial period and their ethnic identity was to wait until colonial rule. For the Chakfem and the Jipal, latent forms of ethnic identity existed in consistent group names from the precolonial period. Temporary setbacks were experienced when the colonial regime mistakenly classified the two groups as Mwaghavul. As the number of educated elites increased, however, the names and identities survived, gaining recognition in PIDAN's lists of ethnic groups. The study aligns with Bala Usman's position that many ethnic groups in Nigeria are products of fusion of peoples and should, therefore, be considered as melting pots; but disagrees

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Datok, *A Short History*, 66.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>77</sup> Danjuma D. Jise (ed.), *The Legacies of Mission and the Evolution of the COCIN Regional Council (RCC) Panyam, 1907-2020* (Kaduna: Megarun Graphic Prints, 2020), 115-116.

<sup>78</sup> In Plateau State (as in other parts of Nigeria) traditional rulers have hierarchies as given to them by the State government: First, Second, and Third Class. These constitute members of the Council of Chiefs and Emirs in the State.

<sup>79</sup> Datok, *A Short History*, 26; Jipal FGD cited.

with his claim that all the peoples of Plateau State are migrants as autochthony is a part of the legend of the Jipal.