

Rituals as Dance and Dance as Rituals

The Drama of Kok Nji and Other Festivals in the Religious Experience of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul in Nigeria¹

Chadic-speakers perform annual festivals of the ancestors, *kok nji*; cropping *kop*; harvesting, *dyip* and hunting *kwat*, which are usually accompanied by dancing, singing and other numerous rites and rituals. These ritual dramas symbolically and overtly express the religious experience, feelings and emotions that are deeply buried in the religious consciousness of the people. This article intends to provide a vivid description of some of these festivals, particularly those of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. Our information is mostly from primary sources directly from the field. This paper has been divided into five sub-headings or sections to provide a clear understanding of the place of calendrical rituals in the indigenous culture of Chadic-speakers. In the first section, that is, the introduction, a brief description of Chadic-speakers is provided. An analysis of the place and the concept of time in determining the period for performing calendrical rites of passages is dealt with in the second section, which is titled Ritual time as a determinant factor for the period of dancing festivals. This is of great significance because calendrical rituals themselves act as markers and indicators of sacred/ritual and profane/secular time. In section three, the major percussive and musical instruments used during calendrical festivals among the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul are discussed. This paper analyses some of the dances and songs of calendrical rituals of passage in the fourth section. These include festivals of the ancestors, *kok nji*; planting, *kop*; harvest *mostar/dyip*; hunting, *kwat* and rain-making, *byang fwan*. This section forms the major focus of this paper and it is consequently the longest. We conclude this article by examining the importance of songs and

¹ At various points in this article, we have used the works of Wambutda (1980; 1991), Goshit (1980; 1981), Danfulani (1982; 1986; 1991; 1994), Bulus (1986; 1990) and Dadi-rep (1987). See references for details.

dance in the calendrical rites of passages of Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul Chadic-speakers.

Introduction

Apart from the Hausa of Northern Nigeria, Chadic-speakers are also found on the eastern edge of the Jos Plateau in Central Nigeria (popularly known as 'the Middle Belt') and in parts of Bauchi and Bornu. Those found on the Jos Plateau are a group of ethnic peoples who speak related languages and dialects. These languages, like Hausa, belong to the Chadic family group of languages. These ethnic groups include the Ngas (the largest of them), Mupun, Mwaghavul, M'ship, M'tel, Goemai, Kofyar, Pan, Mirriam, Bwall, Jipal, Njak, Bogghom, Kadun and the Zar (of Tafawa Balewa). The Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau are a little known people because very little has been written about their religions and culture. Moreover, these are pockets of minority ethnic groups of Nigeria with individual populations ranging from a few thousands to about a million. In this article we will discuss the calendrical festivals of three of these ethnic groups, namely the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul.

Ritual Time as a Determinant Factor for the Period of Dancing Festivals

A general understanding of Chadic-speakers' concept of time will help us analyse their various festivals and the dances that usually accompany them. Chadic-speakers possess a two-dimensional concept of time (cf. Mbiti 1969: 16 f., Mendonsa 1978: 37, Tengan 1990: 12 ff.). It is viewed in terms of day and night, sacred/ritual and profane/secular time frames. This is a direct reflection of Chadic-speakers' world view, which is divided into two, the spiritual realm, *yil nji* and the human domain *yil gurum*. The mediating force between these two worlds is the mystical realm which is made up of supernatural forces such as medicine, *yen*; divination, *Pa*; sorcery, *lom*, meaning leprosy; witchcraft, *sot*; magic, *baak ka* (which refers to 'a person who has splitted his head'); etc. Chadic-speakers, like most Africans view the world, life, time and space very much in terms of a fluid cyclical historical process, with a past, present and future. The past is capable of being re-enacted in the present and future repeatedly. For instance, Chadic-speakers observed changes in the seasons, the marked differences between

day and night and that between the here and now, *yil gurum* — human world and hereafter, *yil nji* — spiritual world and set their time according to these. It is related to observable natural phenomena which determine and express objective time. The principal makers of this cyclical world view and history are the sun, *puus*; moon, *tar* and stars, *zar*; changes in weather and the seasons and natural phenomena. These become reference points because of their rhythmic, repetitive and cyclical patterns.

These two time frames and realms are the inverse of each other and are represented in terms of opposition: divine/human, sacred/profane, morality/immorality, and so forth (cf. Ray 1976: 41). These two opposing features of time are only harmonised and reconciled in ritual. This is what Ray (cf. Ray 1976: 41) correctly referred to as ritual time when he said:

Ritual time is cyclical, not linear, in this respect, ritual is an interruption of ordinary linear time, a time-out-of-time, when man may re-establish contact with the creative events of the cosmogonic period. In ritual, the mythical past is thus constantly recoverable. It is not as Mbiti suggests, an irretrievable 'grave yard' of time, but rather a constant source of new beginnings, of ontological renewal.

Time is located within experience, that is, historical events; events that occur regularly, rhythmically and cyclically. Time, therefore, has a life of its own, it has pulsation like the heart of mammals. Wambutda (1991: 90) rightly pointed out that the Chadic-speakers' term for passage of time is *when* (*shí kodanye/piranyi*). *Shí kondanye* means *when* or *every time* for the Ngas. *Piranyi* (*shipiranyi*) means *when* or *how much* for the Mupun and Mwaghavul. Referring to time as the passage of a moment, Chadic-speakers talk of here, *pe-di-si* and there, *pwensi*. On the ontological plane, *pe-di-si* also refers to *this world* of humans, fauna, flora and mineral organisms, that is *yil gurum*. While *pwensi* refers to the *other world* of spiritual beings — God *Naan*, deities *kum-mo*, ancestors *nji* and spirits forces *riin-mo*; that is *yil nji*.

Bít means a day, but it could also mean a year. Chadic-speakers reckon time beyond two to three years, unlike Ray's general contention to the contrary for Africans (1976: 41).² Chadic-speakers reckon the passage of the years according to religious rites related to festivals and their regular occurrences. For instance, boys' puberty rites, *chan* and *wan/pun* are important for reckoning time since they come up quadrilineally, in Mwagha-

² Mbiti (1969) contended that the African time frame has a long past, a present, but almost no future. Ray extended the concept of the future in African indigenous thought to three years.

vul and some Mupun communities, septennially in Ngas and in every eighth year for other Mupun communities. As will be discussed later in this paper, the Mupun celebrate *bwenene*, festival of the dead every fourteen years. This necessitates preparations some years before the next festival. Age is thus determined according to the number of *vwan/pun*, *bwenene* or other major festivals one has seen and or/experienced in his/her life time. Berthoud (1969: 46) reports that the Jos Plateau peoples kept strict record of the passage of a year this way:

The high priest and his several assistants, in order that their manifold rites may be correctly adjusted to the appropriate times of the year, used a calendar in which each year consisted of twelve lunation or lunar months. The high priest was aware that after three lunar years, he would have fallen behind the civil calendar by one lunar month. Every three years, therefore, he applied a corrective to this by a month's alteration in the calendar date of rituals.

The Jos Plateau peoples thus have a twelve month lunar year, each counted as one moon, *tar nindong*. This roughly corresponds to the lunation of the moon. They reckoned time according to months thus, the month for sowing sorghum or maize, *tar shwe kop/tar kop shwa*, the month for sowing *tar kop*, the month in which cultivation is started, *tar byang maar*, the month for transplanting sorghum, *tar ka kas*, the month for transplanting millet, *tar ka shwa/shwake*, the month for second ridging, *tar gwom/le yil*, the month for harvesting sorghum or maize, *tar shwedyip/dyip shwa* and so forth.

The literal rendering of *tar* is moon, meaning one month, but its real dynamic equivalent as used by Chadic-speakers is more like season. They would talk of the season of particular festivals. For instance, the Ngas talk of *tar mos* Bwir, the season of Bwir beer festival (of Kabwir village), *tar mostar*, the season of the beer festival of the moon, *tar mos lun*, the dry season beer festival of the ancestors (cf. Wambutda 1991: 90). The Mwaghavul talk of the season of their festivals which must begin annually from Dikibin, to Npang (Ampang West) and to the other polities in this strict order: Kerang, Kopaal, Kumbun, Pianya (Panyam), Sulwa, Ruf, Bwai, Pushit, then Bungaha and Mangu, with Mangun, Chakfem and Jipal having separate festivals (Bulus 1986: 67). The Mupun celebrate their seasons according to the flute horn dance of the ancestors, *fer nji*, hunting season, *tar kwat* and various seasonal dances according to types of flutes, drums and other instruments used.

Chadic-speakers recognise four seasons which will correspond in time, but not in accord with weather conditions, to the European seasons. These are shown in the figure below.

Ngas	Mupun/Mwagavul	European
Tar Wep	T a r W a a p	Autumn
Tar Pas	T a r P a s	Summer
Tar Lun	T a r L u n	Winter
Tar Fonton	T a r L o k	Spring

Wambutda (1991: 90) correctly described the situation when he wrote that there were two major seasons, the dry *lun* and wet *pas*. *Lun* starts in October with the ceasing of the rains to April/May when they begin again. *Pas* extends from May, with the first rains, to the showers of October, when they gradually cease. *Wep/waap* is located within *lun*. It lasts from September to the end of October or early November. This period is signalled by the ripeness of the crops, especially maize, and by the onset of autumn, when the vegetation, flowers and the leaves go pink, ready to fall off. The Mupun and Mwaghavul have a rhyme which signals the passage of time. It describes the onset of the dry season usually recognised by the flowering of the *jermen* plant. It goes thus:

Jermen pel o pel, ki lun mang di-o mang,
gere lep ka shin del, ki wur se gwom lipak dyi,
gwom lipak ni dwol shang be,
gurluk gurluk gurluk, gurluk gurluk gurluk.

The jermen plant has flowered, o, it has flowered,
So that the dry season will come, o, it will come,
The raven (*gere*) puts his head through,
So that he will eat the maize that is roasted in its cob,
The maize that is roasted in its cob is so sweet,
(This is how the sweetness is),
Gurluk, gurluk, gurluk; gurluk, gurluk, gurluk!³

This is followed by *tar fonton/lok*, which indicates the beginning of the wet season in March/April. The period begins with the budding of new leaves on trees with the climate becoming unbearably hot. *Tar pas* (wet season) then sets in. Wambutda (1991: 91) has given the following as the farming calendar of the Ngas within the year.

³ *Gwom lipak* refers to maize that is specially roasted in its sheaf or cob, usually eaten by elders alone, and the last line of the rhyme indicates the sweetness of this specially roasted maize.

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|---|---|
| 1) December–January,
<i>tarshwedyip</i> -harvest (kwat). | 2) March–April, <i>tar fonton</i> -farms cleared |
| 3) May, <i>tarswekop</i> -beginning
of sowing | 4) June, <i>tar kwos</i> (<i>nyaklim</i>)-weeding |
| 5) July–August, <i>tar gwak</i> -
second ridging | 6) September, <i>tar gomper</i> -Amper harvest |
| 7) October, <i>tar gombwir</i> -
Kabwir harvest | 8) November, <i>tar ngongarm</i> -Garam
harvest |

We see here that harvest festivals are celebrated by the Ngas village by village, beginning with Kabwir, Amper and Garram.

Rituals are “all forms of mechanical human behaviour ranging from the simple custom of shaking hands and daily etiquette of greeting, to such a complex and solemn act of ritual sacrifices” (Leach 1980: 523). Rites, therefore, are habits and behaviours, repeatable over a period of time in human and cosmic life. Rituals are also defined by Turner (1968: 15) as “prescribed formal behaviour for association not given to technical routine, having reference to beliefs and mystical (or non empirical) beings or powers”. In this light, we see rites of passage as patterned (or repeatable) actions, enacted from time to time in the life of an individual, community, natural phenomena or the ecological-system, to celebrate the passage of human or cosmic life from one phase to the other. Many typologies of rituals have been presented by various scholars.⁴

E. Ikenga-Metuh (1987: 185) sees rites of passage as “patterned action which celebrates the passage of time from one phase of life to another by phenomena such as plants, seasons, animals, insects and in lives of living peoples as an individual or community”.⁵ Rites of passage are based on the African cyclical concept of time, observed from the rhythmic occurrences and the repetative constancy in the changes of time, the seasons and the life of a community and its individual members. Rites of passage could in this sense be referred to as calendrical rites, festivals or rites of temporary cycle. What we refer to here as rites of passage of temporary cycle are what Honko (1979: 376) and Steyne (1989: 99 f.) describe as calendrical rituals, because they emanate from the ‘natural calendar’ based on observations of nature and ecology, and on the ‘economic calendar’ based on economies which are linked together, and the ‘calendar of feasts’ which regulate social

⁴ These include among others: Gluckman 1962: 30 f.; Turner 1968: 2 ff.; Theodorson and Theodorson 1969: 351; Radcliffe-Brown 1971: 122 ff.; Parrinder 1974:79; Honko 1979: 372; Leach 1980: 529; Ikenga-Metuh 1987: 185 ff.; Sørensen 1993: 16 ff.

⁵ See also Gennep’s classic book *Rites des Passage* (1960). See references.

interactions. This is because they are connected with ecological cycles which encompass within them planting, harvest, hunting, fishing and liturgical calendars which were religious in character. This paper entirely leaves out a lucrative area of rituals of the Jos Plateau peoples — life crisis rituals which do not belong to the domain of calendrical rituals, though some of these are equally accompanied by dancing and festivals. We will discuss the major Chadic-speakers' calendrical rites or rites of passage of temporary cycle below.

Percussion and Musical Instruments

It is vital to mention that though Chadic-speakers have various dances, with their accompanying songs, percussive instruments and dance steps, not all of these are used in all ritual festivals because some musical apparatuses are considered as sacred and others as secular. Moreover, instruments used for particular ritual festivals may not be regarded as suitable for others. Most *kok nji*, festivals of the ancestors are, for instance, dominated by the animal horn flute which the Ngas call *sombi* and the Mupun and Mwaghavul call *fer*. Consequently, the festival dance of the ancestors is called *fer Nji*, the horn flute dance (or festival) of the ancestors or simply *kok Nji*, the dance of the ancestors among the last two ethnic groups.

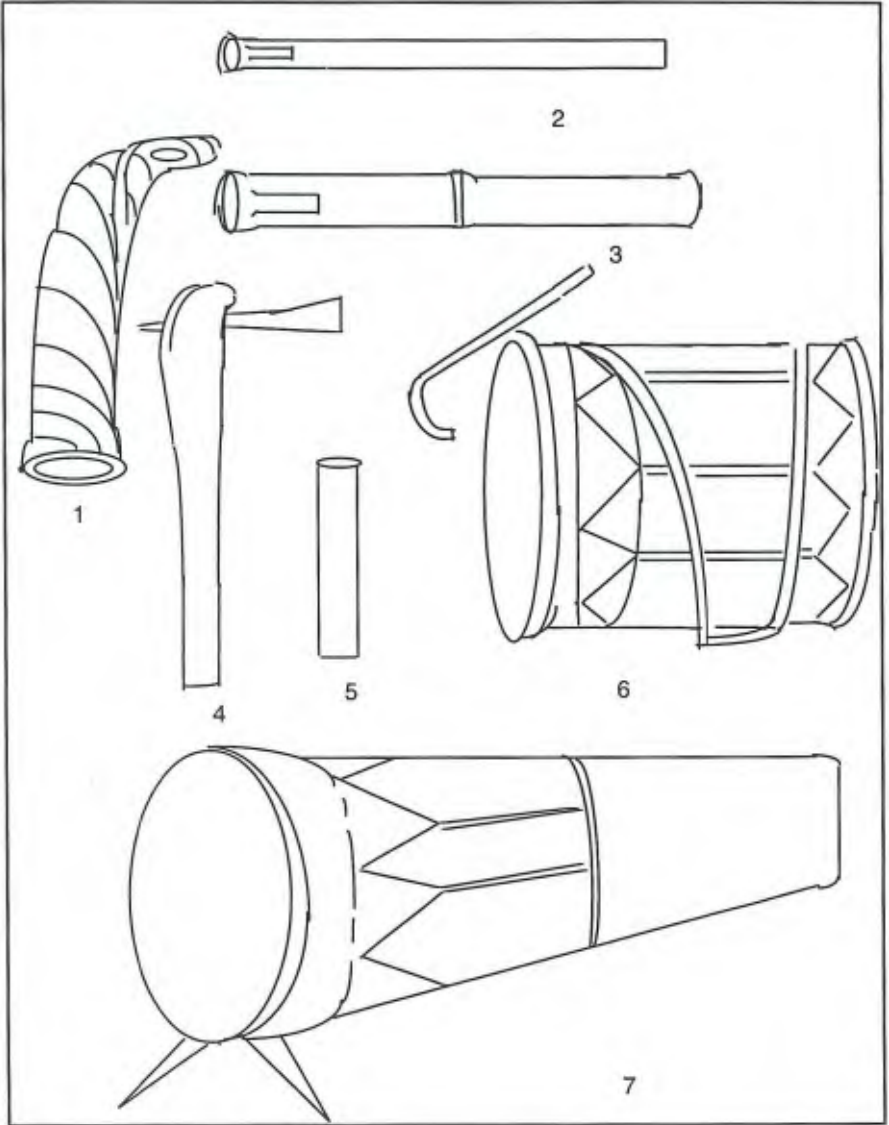
The horn flute is a musical instrument made from the horn of an animal. A complete set is made up of various sizes, shapes and lengths making a variety of sounds when blown. These are composed of horns from cattle, gazelles, antelopes, buffaloes, rams and other animals. A few may even be made from gourds that grow into the required shape while others still may be curved out of wood. A small oblong opening is usually cut in the side of the narrow part of the horn towards the tip and the sharp tip is cut open as well. The oblong opening is meant for blowing the horn and the two openings at the tip and the broad part in the opposite side are used for controlling the melody made by the horn. The horn flute dancers dance in a line or cycle according to the sizes of their horns. They blow the horns in unison and make music by controlling the passage of the air blown into the horn through the oblong opening at the tip. The sound is controlled by simultaneously blocking and/or opening of the passages at the base and the tip of the horn with both the left and right hands. Only certain rhythms, songs and dance steps are made during *fer nji*, the horn flute festival of the ancestors. Women and children can participate in some *fer nji*, as we shall observe below, while in most cases, when the *nji*, ancestors emerge sud-

denly in the form of masquerades, *nwong* sounding the animal horn flute accompanied with shouting and the supernatural appearance of dust in the air, women and children must hide. Only post menopausal women may go about their duties because it is believed that in their post-menopausal condition, they have become like men. Yet in crises periods such as attacks by enemies, wild animals and other such emergencies, they would be required to go into hiding too.

However, the songs of the *nji*, *ancestors* can also be sounded on three other instruments but with less dramatic effect. They are used only in social and festival dances, and not in dire emergencies in which the lives of people in the community may be at risk. These three musical instruments are the reed flute, *bel*, the thin corn-stalk flute, *yang/nvelang* or *velang* and the big corn-stalk flute, *kwarak*. The reed flute, *bel* is either used by young men and children as a musical instrument on its own or by elders who use it as a rule in conjunction with the animal horn flute. The horn flute dancers alternately switch from blowing the horn and the reed flute but maintaining the same rhythm and dance steps for the same songs. Thus as they dance, the reed flute is usually tied to the one hand while the horn is held with the other.

Animal horn and reed flute dance is more popular among Ngas and Mupun, the big corn-stalk flute dance predominates among M'ship and the Mupun of Gitong, Kagu, Awor-Dyis and Jiblik and the small corn-stalk flute dance is most popular among the Mwaghavul. All these musical instruments, however, are known among all these Chadic-speaking ethnic groups. It is customary for these instruments to be accompanied by other percussive implements. These include iron cymbals, *ndol* tied over rags of cloths from the ankle up towards the knee of the dancer. Some dancers tie these to only one of their legs, while expert dancers tie them to both legs. Other percussive instruments are gourd tambourines, *cha/che* made out of cut olive seeds sewn over a gourd, and axes, *sep* used by older women in the *chyer* dance after successful hunts, rain-making rites and harvest.

In all festival dances, two sets of drums are used: the small and big drums. The small drum *nging* is hung over one shoulder and is beaten by a curved stick which is held by the free hand. The other hand and one of the knees control the beat and musical messages communicated on the drum. This drum is used in all social events and two or more drummers may perform simultaneously with small drums of various sizes in a festival depending on the number of dancers present and the event. The big drum (*kung*) is a sacred drum which is so big that the drummer sits on it, stands over it or stands by its side when he performs. It is too big to be hung on



Key

1 *Fer (sombi)*, animal horn dance flute - curved from animal horns of various sizes. Some are curved from wood or the gourd plant.

2 *Yang (nvelang/velang)*, small-corn stalk dance flute - curved in many sizes from small stalks of the Guinea corn plant.

3 *Kwarak*, big-corn stalk dance flute - curved in various sizes from larger stalks of the Guinea corn plant.

4 *Sep*, axe - made of an iron blade fixed to a wooden handle.

5 *Bél*, the hollow reed flute - made from hollow reeds.

6 *Nging*, the small drum - made of a hollowed-out tree trunk, covered at both ends with animal skin.

7 *Kung*, the sacred or big drum - made of a hollowed out tree trunk, covered at the wider end with animal skin.



the shoulder and it makes bass baritone sounds only. The drummer moves the drum either by dragging it on the ground, in-between his legs, beating the drum while it is carried shoulder high by some youths or carries it on one shoulder while he beats it with his free hand. The big drum is beaten not with a stick but with bare hands.

Calendrical Festivals — Dances and Songs

In this section we will discuss four festivals of the ancestors, *nji*. These are the cropping, harvesting, hunting and rain-making festivals of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. *Mos Won*, beer festival of the ancestors belongs exclusively to the Ngas, *Nwong Kum*, masquerade festival of the deities and *Kaat Nji/Kum Nji*, festival of the ancestors both belong to the Mupun and Mwaghavul, while *bwenene* is an ancestral festival of the dead celebrated only by the Mupun. The other festivals which we discuss below are all performed by these three ethnic groups though some of them go by different names.

Festival of the Nji, Ancestors

Mos Won, Beer Festival of Masquerades or Ancestors of the Ngas

The Ngas refer to this festival as *mos won*, beer festival of the masquerades. They celebrate the beer festival of the ancestors, *mos won* septennially from July to August, if the economy can sustain it, then *mos tar*, an annual beer festival of the moon must be put off that year. The *mos won* of the Ngas takes six years to prepare; it lasts seven days and, it will be strange if the festival is not accompanied by intermittent drizzling rain throughout its seven days' duration. This is to cool the *nji*, ancestors. Thus *Pa/pe* diviners have to choose a most suitable week, or consult rain makers from among themselves. It is marked by the return of all Ngas daughters, *ripmwa* to their patri-clans. This festival is a period of family reunion, though it is not mandatory for a son who has established himself somewhere to return home, as it is for the daughter. *Mos won*, beer festival of the ancestors is also a period of general cleansing of the village and shrines. It is accompanied by cooking, feasting and eating. Special dishes are prepared for the *nji*, ancestors according to their tastes and favourite foods while they were still living.

A daughter from each compound, a virgin, called 'girl of the compound gate', *riip pobong* is chosen to take the prepared food to the grove of *nji*, ancestors in special goured-like calabashes, *de-pofil*. The ancestors are fed according to their rank with bits of food and meat. Each *won* masquerad is asked to bless the people, while the elders also wish the ancestors a peaceful life, as if, after all, they also need human blessing! The *won* masquerade dance, *tam won*, a communion dance in which the living and the dead jointly participate, begins after the sharing of the communal meal and beer. Four sets of horns, *sombi* are blown to signal the beginning of the dance. Stories about the appearance of phantoms and apparitions of the dead to the living are most common in Ngasland during this period. Though, unlike at other times, they would be quite harmless.

The men return from the grove in the form of *won* masquerads but without clothing. Since it is already night time, their identity will not be exposed to women and children. They move from compound to compound, blessing and warning the people. In compounds who lost their members recently, they give messages from their loved ones, comfort them and take back messages for the ancestors. In such cases, the *won* adapts the voice and personality of one of the departed from that compound for passing whatever message the dead want to convey to members of their living families. The message is given directly to a member of the compound, after he has been called by name, but in the hearing of the women and children. A woman who beats her husband, treats him with disrespect and is stingy to his relations may be warned to change her bad ways. Likewise a wife beater or an irresponsible husband. This happens on the third day of the festival. This is a period of real wailing for two paradoxically opposed reasons. On the one hand the people mourn the loss of loved ones, especially the recent dead. However, on the other hand, it is a wailing of victory over death. Since they believe that somehow the dead are with them, and they have even visited them, death has been defeated at the end. Psychologically, death is powerless, because the dead are not dead, but they are *nji*, the living dead, and they form an extension of the community of the living. The etymology of the term *Nji*, which denotes ancestors, emerges from the term *ji*, which means 'come' or 'arrival'. *Nji* may therefore mean 'the one who comes back or returns from the dead'. The belief in rebirth is thus very strong among the Chadic-speakers of the Jos-Plateau area, particularly, the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul. In each compound, the *won*, masquerade ends his message with a rhyme thus:

Ngas

Potambi 'dom nyin ke wo-mmm-h
Potambi 'dom nyin ke wo-mmm-h
Bwot nan ko na met d'e---mmm-h
Na met Sar'a ka na kat mwa d'e
Na ba Sar'a-----woo-wo-wo
Na ba Sar'a--e-----woo-wo-wo.
 (Wambutda 1980: 12 f.).

Translation

Dawn is about to break-mmm-h
 Dawn is about to break-mmm-h
 Release me to go there-mmm-h
 To return to Sara and meet them
 I am returning to Sar'a---woo-wo-wo
 I am returning to Sar'a--e--woo-wo-wo.

Sara represents the historical home of origin in the east (towards the Chad-Borno basin) from where the dead are reborn according to Ngas traditions. According to the oral traditions of the Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau, they all originated from the Chad-Borno basin towards the east. Sara (or Sur) is actually a major stopping place on their journey towards the mountain ranges of the Jos Plateau. It is a place name that is traceable even in modern times. Thus the dead are buried facing Sara, the east, to facilitate return to the human world. The rhyme above therefore beautifully reconciles historical events with religious concepts of the Ngas people, such as belief in rebirth.

Pangs and anxieties are thereby psychologically exuded from death, while a bridge of solidarity and oneness is simultaneously built between the world of the living and the living dead on one continuing mode of existence. The drizzling of rain apart from symbolizing cool weather for the ancestors and their blessings, also depicts the soaking and eventual washing off of all the sins of the community and the setting right of soured relationships between the living and the dead.

However, *mos won may* be put off when there is a drought, in consequence of which there is insufficient food to stage it in full. In such circumstances, the Ngas will prepare a thick ceremonial dough, *gwim* cooked in the broth of animal meat or vegetables, especially garden eggs, *kwul* and some hot spices. This is prepared and eaten with the understanding that people will decrease from all wickedness, while witches, *sot* and sorcerers who partake of this ritual meal will die. This is because *gwim* is a rite of covenant making or an oath taking meal, whereby the people reach an agreement over an oath before the spirit realm that they will desist from committing evil and wickedness in the land. Drought is usually regarded as a consequence of communal and individual sins. The *gwim* rite is thus conducted as a part of cleansing and purification ceremony before the rain maker is invited to make rain. Without this rite of oath taking or covenant making, the drought it is believed will persist.

Nwong Kum, Masquerade Festival of the Deities of the Mupun and Mwaghavul

They celebrate it annually from April to July. The *nwong Kum* masquerade which walks in the nude comes out on the third day of the *nwong* festival and continues to appear for three days before they go back to the sacred grove, *lit kum*. From there they are believed to disappear into the ground. Among the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul, when the ancestors, *nji* visit the living to have communion with them, they are called masquerades, *won-mwa* or *nwong-mo* whether they are masked or unmasked. Another feature of this festival shared by these ethnic groups is the absence of clothed masquerades. The *nji* ancestors wear no masks but are 'clothed in clouds', that is in the nude. Whenever they *nji* appear in the nude, characterised by shouting, the blowing of *fer nji*, the animal horn flute of the ancestors and the raising of dust in the air through supernatural means, women and children must go into seclusion or incur the penalty of barrenness or perpetual ill-health. This is because *wong kum* is a naked masquerade. Since he wears no cloths, only post-menopausal women, whom as we have mentioned are considered of equal status with men, could go about their normal business when he appears.

Kaat / Kum Nji, Ancestors' Festival of the Mupun and Mwaghavul

The Mupun and Mwaghavul call this festival *kok nji / puus kaat nji*, the dance or day of the ancestors. It is also called *mwes nwong*, beer festival of the ancestors. Unlike that of the Ngas, this is an annual festival for the veneration of the *nji*, the ancestors. It is a period when the living receive love, care and blessing from the ancestors. Humans, livestock, tree crops and the whole land are blessed by the ancestors during this period. The festival is celebrated from one community to the other. Among the Mwaghavul, it is celebrated first by Dikibin, where the *nji*, ancestors are said to miraculously emerge from the ground. The dancing and celebrations are then moved to Npang (Ampang West), Kerang, Kopal, Kombun, Panyam, Sulwa, Ruf, Bwai, Pushit, Bungaha and Mangu according to their set seasons in that strict order. The Mupun also celebrate *kaat / Kum nji* according to their polities, Jipari (Longdren, Asa and Kong) Jiblik, Abwor/Dyis, Kagu and Jing (but not in this particular order).

The *nji*, ancestors' festival starts with two spirits of the ancestors represented by an old man called *kamu* (the meaning of the term is obscure) and an old woman called *niwa nji*, which means mother of the ancestors. As they emerge, their cries are beaten on the large sacred or ritual drum,

ngin-shi-ver-kung (meaning the long-legged drum). The pair of *nji* talk in a ritually incomprehensible language. The feminine voice is ventriloquised by a man, sounding in a high-pitched squeaky voice, *hi wa wa wa wai, hi niwa nji!* It comes out in shrill falsetto shrieks. The male *nji*, *kamu* cries in exceedingly gruff, groaning tones, *mu mu mu mu mmm!* This is sounded from a big cow horn, *som ning*. By this, they indicate to the community that they are hungry and must be fed immediately. *Nuwa nji* is said to have a naughty child, *laa nji* which cries sirenously for being hit on the head. When such happens, a housewife is called (from behind her hut) to pet the child. This demands a fowl, symbolising food given to the ancestor child to stop crying, after the manner in which parents today give candies and other food items to their children to serve the same purpose. After these pair, the ancestor of the gorge, *nji wonkong* emerges first after the last Mwaghavul hunting festival, that is *Bwanzuhum* of Kerang/Kopal and stays for about a month before the arrival of others.

As observed with the Ngas *won kum* festival, women must keep off. As in Ngas, their role is to prepare dishes favoured by the *nji*, ancestors, especially *kwaklik/kwakil*, the most palatable food for *nji*, prepared from a species of large seed climbing bean plant. The life of a woman who has no *kwaklik* for the *nji* may be threatened. The women dread the noise of *nji*. They run home before nightfall when the *nji* appear, but as in Ngas, with the exception of post-menopausal women. A younger woman who sees *nji*, it is believed, must fall ill, and a goat is required for redressive ritual sacrifices (*tok kum*) after a session of *Pa* divination. All the *nji* ancestors during this festival emerge by night as *wong* masquerades to allow women to go about their normal duties during the day, except *nji puus*, the ancestor of the daytime (spirit of the sun). In Mupun and Mwaghavul, males, (not females) take food prepared by women to the *nji*, ancestors. Men carrying the food must not look back. As in Ngas, the *nji* move from compound to compound, feasting on food, meat and beer brewed from newly harvested corn and millet, *kas*. The beer must not be brewed from old stock of corn or millet.

Where they are fed, they bless the compound and its occupants for being generous to the *nji*, ancestors in their entertainment and sacrifices. They then invite the householder to come out and collect new seeds for cultivation in the next farming season in the following manner, "*woo da kom tak woo! A put a lap chirem si war ke! Kat puus ya pe be ni ba lom di a maar*". This means, "oh so and so (name of householder is called) oh! Come out and receive these seeds! When the sun comes out, it will multiply on your farm". Curses are rained on those who made inadequate provisions for

them in this manner, “*woo da kom tak woo! Shilak kaa, fuur kaa, chyar kaa!*” This means, “oh so and so (name of householder is called) oh! Weeds will germinate, grasses will germinate, reeds will germinate”! The first person is assured of fertility and prosperity, while the second householder is told that various species of weeds and grasses will take over his farms. With these blessings and curses, they depart to the spirit land, *yil nji*. Their visit is accompanied with dancing and wailing as that of the Ngas.

Nji, ancestors are seen as spirits, therefore they are believed to be invisible, but they are said to metamorphose into a type of brown ants called *nkamkos* or *kamkaghas* to devour their sacrifices and offerings. When these types of ants appear on the scene of any sacrifices, it is believed that the sacrifices have been accepted by the ancestors. Like the *kum won* of the Ngas, *wong nji* ancestral masquerades of the Mwachavul wear no masks, while those of the Mupun wear masks. Generally speaking, most Mwachavul masquerades *wong* wear no masks, except a particular type from Panyam. In Ngas and Mupun, most do, except *kum won* of the Ngas.

Mupun Bwenene, Festival of the Dead

In addition to the annual *nji*, ancestors' festival, the Mupun observe a festival in honour of the dead once in every fourteen years known as *bwenene*. *Bwenene* is an occasion for remembering all the departed. It is an occasion of great feasting, wailing and jubilation, sadness and joy. Men, women and children participate in the dancing and feasting (eating and drinking). Women turn out in colourful wear and daub their bodies with *lip*, ritual red powder. A great deal of beer is brewed and many cows, horses and other animals are slaughtered. Here, the ancestors come out in the form of *nwong*, masquerades and feast, dance and have communion with the living. The history of the people together with the achievements of the ancestors are recounted. They chant, *tam* the virtues of the ancestors and sing songs of praise to them. The good and evil deeds of the dead are remembered and also sung in songs. At the same time they sing songs which state the moral virtues demanded of men by the ancestors, *nji*. They are composed of some of these lines thus:

Mupun

Bwenene ki wal a gurum ki riin- oh-vi-ko-ha
bwenene ki wal a biring ki dang-oh-vi-ko-ha
bwenene ki wal a mat ki wur----oh-vi-ko-ha
bwenene ki wal a nin ki som----oh-vi-ko-ha
bwenene ki wal a mish ki dang-oh-vi-ko-ha
bwenene ki wal a mat ki dyen---- oh-vi-ko-ha

Translation

Bwenene needs a person with charm
 bwenene needs a horse with a tail
 bwenene needs a woman with breasts
 bwenene needs a cow with horns
 bwenene needs a man with a tail
 bwnene needs a woman with character

The wordings of the *bwenene* dance song thus demonstrate the moral virtues and piety the *nji*, ancestors demand of human society in order to ensure prosperity, good health and the progress of individuals and the entire community. Hence a person without good moral virtues is not acceptable to the ancestors, just as one cannot imagine a horse without its tail, a cow without its horns, a woman without breasts and a woman who attracts men without *riin*, charm, charisma, enchantment and glamour.

As they sing and dance, drink beer, eat and chant, tears of remembrance pour down their cheeks. There is no bitter wailing as in mourning, but these are tears of a knowing reflection of the past, with a confidence that the dead are present with them as they face the future. The *Bwenene* festival is an occasion where a man may be seen simultaneously shading tears and jubilating. It is celebrated with all the grandeur, pomp and fanfares the people can put up. The Mupun saying, *shang baar do ter ki nen mbi gwom bwenene*, which means "the girl who likes to show off slept hungry yesterday because she put all her hopes on the food of the *bwenene* feast" paints a clear picture of the festival. It is one in which there is a lot to eat and drink, but children, as is the custom, are warned to feed properly at home before going to any festival to forestall what happened to this legendary girl called *shangbaar*, (its literal meaning portrays a girl who likes to 'show off') who left home hungry because she thought she would have much to eat at the festival. The dance may continue for a week, while the elders secretly perform some cleansing rites.

Kop, Planting Festival

The Ngas call it *mos lun*, the beer festival of the dry season. This is a misleading name because it is actually a planting festival, celebrated at the end of *tar lun*, the dry season to usher in *tar fonton/lok*, the rainy or planting season. The Mupun and Mwaghavul call it *tenpe*, purifying the land by pressing it down. Most Chadic-speakers celebrate it in April/May, and generally in the same fashion. It marks the beginning of ridging and cropping and is celebrated as a rule before the first rains. The whole community is involved. Like the *nji*, ancestors' festival, this is also a cleansing festival, but unlike the former, it is targeted at the compounds, village and farm lands, not the sacred places. The compounds are cleansed of dirt. It is an occasion for renovation work in the compound. Old seats are replaced with new ones in the compound and 'under the tree' sheds outside. Pavements, terraces, *saak* and stone seats are rebuilt. The insides of huts are

plastered and redesigned with fresh shiny earth procured from clay blended with ant hills.

Mos lun/tenpe is a fertility festival aimed at stimulating productivity in man, animals and crops. This festival ensures that crops germinate properly on the farms. It is to secure peace, confidence and well-being from the ancestors, throughout the approaching farming season. It prepares the people physically and psychologically to face the rigours and hardships of the long hours of working on the farm. Any illness or accident at this time can be fatal, since that will mean fewer hands to till the ground, weed the farms, bring in the harvest and thresh it. The *kum-mo*, deities and *nji*, ancestors are therefore prayed to for protection. A date is set by the *mishkom*, priest chief and his *deskom*, council of elders at the palace. This is determined through divination or from a careful observation of the lunation of the moon, or both. The message is sent round the village through the usual shouting-relay system, *bwet do*. This does not mark the day the festival itself is started, but it signals the day on which the brewing of beer *mwes* for the festival starts. By this, the people know when the festival will start, since beer brewing takes three days. Grain which is needed for brewing beer is exacted from householders for the festival.

The compound deity, *Kum lu/Kum gulis* is specially worshipped during this festival, though it is also a general period for venerating all the *Kum-mo*, deities and ritual cleansing of the people and the land. Thus goats exacted from fines, especially adultery fines, are used at this festival as sacrifices. Where these are not enough or lacking, the priest chief provides them from his own stock to ensure purification, *tenpe*. The people demonstrate their allegiance to the deities during *tenpe*. Through it humans solicit good wishes for the whole community during the year.

The purification rituals culminate with the rites of *tenpe/pidan*, meaning 'the stamping of the land', 'pressing the land', 'suppressing spirituality' or 'cooling the land'. The action of stamping, pressing, suppressing or cooling is done through the ritual cutting of the leaves of wild custard apple, *amona senegalensis*. This plant is known in Ngas and Mupun as *yim wut*. These leaves (of the wild custard) are then dressed in *fonio* flour mix or sacrificial blood. They are then pressed or pinned down on the corners of farm lands with stones or earth, indicating purification. This also serves as a quasi-religious rite of asserting ownership over land, particularly when a man wants to reclaim a piece of land which has been leased out for a number of years. Thus the land is purified, and any trespassers on the land will fall ill. This is because the rites invoke the deity of harvest, *tenpe* to stand guard over the farm land.

The beer brewed for the festival is taken to the forest shrine or grove of the deities, *lit Kum* on the third day. Sacrifices are made and libations are poured to the deities in their various shrines and the ancestors collectively in the *lit Kum*, sacred grove of the deities. The beer is conveyed in the long necked pots of the deities, *tul Kum*. The pots of beer are taken from each compound to their high places by adult males on their shoulders. As a rule, men do not carry pots, the exception as in this case, being during sacred rituals, and even then, they must carry it on their shoulders, not on the head as women would normally have done. They are poured out as libations on the stones that individually represented the ancestors or spots recognised as the seats of the ancestors. Only initiated adult males are involved in these rituals at the grove. Wambutda (1991: 131) states that as they present the sacrifices, offerings and libations, the high priest utters the following incantations:

Here we have brought to you our fathers (ancestors) the food we are able to find, we pray you to accept it, that the community may live in peace (*tong zum*), that as we set out to farm this year, our lives may be spared to see the new harvest in good health. That no child may stumble. That the hands put forth to the terraces on the farms to get rid of weeds might not be harmed.

This last line of the prayer is in reference to snake bites and the havoc caused by scorpions, which are by no means uncommon. They then end by wishing the ancestors peace.

The major difference between *mos won/puus kaat nji* and *mos lun/tenpe* is that the former is conducted by the ancestors themselves in communion with the people, whereas the latter is conducted by the people in communion with the deities and ancestors. In the former, the dancing is only for the ancestors *nji*, appearing in the form of *won/nwong*, masquerades but without masks. In the latter, the dancing is done by all and sundry. The dance lasts a whole day. Starting from the palace, they move from compound to compound, until they return to the palace where they had started. There may be some brief mourning in a compound where one has died recently. The feasting (eating and drinking) is organised according to age grades, *gan* and communal farming groups. Young men in their separate farming groups, *wuk zilang*, young girls, *wuk jirap*, older men and women slaughter and prepare goats and fowls they have been able to barter in exchange for labour, *kàt* and feast in groups. They drink beer, *mwes* and gruel, *waar* and dance through most of the night.

Mostar/Tar Dyip, Harvest Festival

Chadic-speakers and their Jos Plateau neighbours observe rites of harvest which is more famous among the Ngas, where they are called the beer festival of the moon, *mos tar*. It is also an end of year festival and popularly translated as “festival of the shooting of the moon”, since the ritual of shooting of the moon, *pus tar*, forms the climax of this rite. It is therefore annually held in anticipation of the appearance of the new moon, in October/November, depending on the polity concerned. It must be celebrated before new crops are eaten. Amper usually leads the Ngas polities, followed by Kabwir, Gyangyang and Garam.

A special sighting of the moon, *tar* is required for this festival, unlike the others. The time for the sighting of the moon, *tar* corresponds with the calendrical month of September. *Mostar* can be referred to as first fruits rituals. The Gomper (the people of Amper) celebrate it in September, the Gombwir (the people of Kabwir) in October, the Gongaram (the people of Garam) in November, and so on, as the Ngas move from one polity or village to the other celebrating *mostar*. With time the *mostar* of the Gomper (Amper) has become more famous, and people from all Ngas troop down to Amper to participate in its merriment, which attracts even non Ngas people. If *mos won*, the beer festival of the ancestors (or masquerades) takes place in a particular year, *mos tar* is put off because of the overlapping in period and also for economic reasons. *Mos won* is preferred in such circumstances because it is not an annual event like *mos tar*, but is celebrated septennially. *Mos tar* is another occasion for cleansing of the community. This time all roads and dumping sites of rubbish, *zuk* are all cleared. This preliminary cleansing is called *nawut*, and *wongan*, a particular masquerade (named after the Ngan people, a Ngas name for the Tarok, their neighbours to the South-East) goes round inspecting the cleanliness of the roads and dumping sights in a mask.

The date of *mos tar* is chosen just a day before everyone can see the new moon with the naked eye, referred to as the day when animals see it, *nam mwa ni* (Wambutda 1991: 139). For its sighting, persons of second sight (*zari/potur*) are required to determine its appearance on the night which other ordinary persons cannot see it. A piece of rope might be used for determining the calendar, beginning from *mostar* period, (for instance taking October for Amper), the high priests who keep such ropes will begin to tie knots of equal distance along the rope as each *tar*, moon passes. The brewing of beer has to begin three days before the festival, thus the special sighting needs persons with *zari/potur*, intuitive powers. The taking of

beer to the sacred grove or forest of the deities, the usual requests for good health, peace and so forth, are the same as those described above. However, the emphasis of prayer here is on a special request: *ko mu lep shwe mpwi nyi po zum*, "that we may put the new corn into our mouths in peace".

Then follows the rite of *pus tar*, the mock shooting of the moon. This is not done with the usual poisoned arrows, but with stalks of a plant akin to elephant grass. The high priest who shoots at the moon, *ngo-pus-tar* goes to one of the bush shrines in the company of other priests. As he prepares for *pus tar*, the mock shooting of the moon, his companions continue with the performance of some rituals such as the pouring of libations to the ancestor and deities. He takes a bow and two arrows, and then aims one at the new moon and shoots at it, and then the second. Then he shouts, *Woi hui! Wep da mang kwat! Ko mat mwa se bira mwa da! Mu chin zum da!*, "Oh!, the year has ended! Autumn has come for women to eat those things again! Celebrate it in peace!" It is from this ritual that the festival derives its name. Throughout the ritual, none of the priests talk to anyone. The ritual is then followed by shouts and the blowing of small horn flutes, *sombi*, first in the palace, then followed by other villages. The major deity associated with *mos tar* is *Kum Tau* or *Tawu*. This is because *Tau* is the patron deity of all Ngas. Symbolised by a metal object, he is the protective deity of the community and the whole of the Ngas ethnic group. A group of young boys called 'the children of the moon', *jep tar*⁶ or 'macho men' come out with whips in their hands and their bodies painted as white as the moon itself. They beat anyone they meet, even each other, as they run and chase people they find on their way to the dancing square. People run helter-skelter, but still turn up in the square for the *mos tar*, beer of the moon dance. As a festival of first fruits, women and men sing and dance side by side, holding hands in a chain gang across each others' shoulders, jubilating and thanking the ancestors and deities for a bumper harvest.

Wonngan appears on the last evening before the beer is ready for drinking wearing a mask. Its mask is made of two parts: the main body of the mask being made of dry guinea corn leaves measured to the knee and the headgear being made of neat twines, knitted into a spiral shape with two

⁶ The term *tar* should not be confused with madness, since the word denotes both 'the moon' and 'madness'. This caution should be heeded because the children of the moon, *jep tar* behave like mad men. For instance, they beat each other without mercy, pretending not to feel the pain. It is similar to the Fulani *shoro* beating festival, the main difference being that in the Fulani *shoro*, a debt of beatings is either being paid or contracted against the next *shoro* season.

small sticks pierced at right angles through the apex of the gear. A little opening is left in the headgear to allow for sight and breath. This facial aperture is decorated with red and black local seeds surrounded at the outer margin by dried red garden eggs which are left hanging loosely. At about 8 pm. *wonngan* leave its shrine for the palace without the mask since it is now dark enough for it to conceal its human identity. At the palace it speaks in an esoteric language in Tarok giving messages from the world of the *nji*, ancestors. The conversation goes thus:

Ngas

M. Nkara 'n 'da mwa yal nye 'da?
 C. E, mwa yal nyet.
 M. Wok kam k sh k ke?
 C. Mwa yal k sh k nyet doo.
 M. D de mwa lep nyan.

Translation

Are all the souls well?
 Yes, they are all well (they all woke up well).
 Is all the compound well?
 Yes they are all well indeed.
 Our fathers (the ancestors) sent me.

Silence! M.

Ka a, da pe wu tap ke k lon damwa.

ke k pyan koce ka!
 Dan mante wu cadir,
 Pifana na we e soon dundun,
 Nya we m na yil k dyis,
 Me k tori mwa dun dun.
 K pocokfi dan na ji ru Garu,
 Na yal di shi wurn wurn,
 Dan na ru.

As it is, please take care of the wealth in the Land

Headache will not afflict any one of them!
 However do not forget the one thing,
 I come from a very far place,
 I come (my own) from the land of sand,
 which is full of baobob trees.
 With thirst I arrived at Garu,
 with haste I left there,
 To arrive here (Wambutda 1980: 10).⁷

The high priest translates the message to those who are listening from their various rooms within the compound. After the speech, the priest chief thanks the masquerade who is given some beer and returns to the shrine at midnight after a drinking debauchery. At dawn the Queen (first wife of the priest chief) or her representative shouts out, *mwa dur tar wo!* "the moon is closed", indicating that the festival of the moon has come to an end, and the people disperse. Again, the *jep tarmwa*, children of the moon run home whipping each other and anyone they meet on the way.

The Mupun and the Mwaghavul, like the Ngas, celebrate their harvest festivals community by community. As with the other Jos Plateau peoples, new crops such as yams, cocoa yams, *fonio* and maize are taboo to humans until ritual sacrifices have been performed in honour of the deities and an-

⁷ The letter 'M' in this dialogue stands for the *won gang* masquerade and 'C' denotes the *ngolong Kum*, the High Priest of the palace shrine and the spokesman of the *ngolong*, Priest Chief

cestors. Culprits are believed to fall sick, except perhaps in the case of maize, which could be eaten secretly but very seldomly. The Mangun celebrate these rites in what they call *pe kaat nji*, the meeting place or market of the ancestors. In Mangun, like in Ngas, young men whip themselves with jute plaited ropes, which make snapping sounds and could hit hard. Thus this first fruit festival is also used for testing manhood and endurance, "after all, the harvest is just around the corner". Three days before the festival, *Pa* divination is used to procrastinate what the new year holds, after new crops have been offered to the deities and the ancestors in the form of sacrificial meals and libations of beer brewed from them. They thus taste the first fruits before humans. The date is announced to the people through the usual shouting method, thus: *Kai o! kai o! kai o! Puus kaat ni a bit si*: "Attention! attention! attention! The day of the harvest festival is three days away". On the festival day, people engage in harvest and roasting of new yams, cocoa yams and maize, especially in the form of *gwomlipak*, maize roasted in its cob. All sorts of delicacies are prepared for old men and women, who eat and shout, "we have eaten something new", *ging-ging mbi po*. They give praise and thanks to God, the deities and ancestors, saying:

We have seen this (new year), we have eaten new crops, may you grant us the opportunity to see the next one. We shall eat this one (referring to the harvest) before we say, "it is too small, (*se dan mu baak*) as the hen that eats and wipes her beak on the ground as if she has eaten nothing". We thank you for the harvest. May we eat it in peace and good health.⁸

Throughout the harvest period and the whole of the dry season, various age groups and dance clubs engage in active dancing in the evenings. They evolve a convenient calendar for the dances depending on whether they are village or inter village in nature. The various groups use this period to solicit for funds both in cash and in kind to be used for the forthcoming cropping festivals with the first rains. The harvesting and dry season is also a time of great social events, which include marriages and various dances. The most popular dances during this period include *kok jirap*, the dance of the maidens; *chyer*, the dance of the elderly; *fer*, the horn flute dance; *kwarak* and *yang*, two types of corn-stalk flute dances and *bel*, the reed flute dance. A popular *kok jirap*, maidens song titled *ka mu tok shik ki mishkom*, 'we went up to greet the chief' is sang with the following opening lines:

⁸ The author observed several such rites of praises to God when he was a child. Even Christians chant the words of these rites during harvests.

<i>Ka mu tok shik ki mishkom</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Ba mu kat wur lap mun kas</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>A dyel ah a muut yi Gwa?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Ba a byang mun mu wa nbun dako!</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Sak mar dan ter ki nen ah?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>Tu ning dan se ner ni ah?</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
<i>mmmmmmm oyeyewo mmmmmmm</i>	<i>oye yewo</i>
We went up to greet the chief	oye ye wo
We found out that he did not answer us	oye ye wo
Is it a legal issue or ill-health little boy?	oye ye wo
Then tell us so that we may go home	oye ye wo
Do I farm and then lack food to eat?	oye ye wo
Do I kill a cow and then eat only the vagina?	oye ye wo
The white man has brought a new world	oye ye wo
mmmmmmm, oye ye wo! mmmmmmm!	oye ye wo

However, there is room for artistry and creativity in the singing of songs during festivals, and in fact, all dancers are expected to be creative in this respect. After a lead singer (and any one could play this role) introduces a new song, s/he is allowed to sing the opening lines after which other dancers join in, spontaneously creating in their own words new lines which must actually rhyme with the rhythm of the song being sang and danced. From time to time, gifted artists and song constructors create entirely new songs which comprise of short rhyming opening lines as the one above. These usually emanate out of concrete historical, economic, political and religious experiences of the people at that particular time. A song may be constructed when someone *ta shon*, resurrects in the form of a ghost after his/her death, is accused of *put sot*, bewitching others, when a girl becomes pregnant out of wedlock, *gam aak nkujing* and any other scandal of the times. Some songs and rhymes are constructed based on the beauty of nature, the gods, taboos, sacred rites, etc. Thus some songs are new while others are very old. All these form part of the rich cultural heritage of folklore and folk songs inherited by every generation of Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau.

Kwat, Hunting Festival

All Jos Plateau peoples organise annual hunting festivals each dry season from the month of December when all the harvest has been gathered in. It is a period in the year of peace when warriors retire to hunting and a new crop of the ethnic soldiers emerges as hunting champions. The Mupun, Mwaghavul and Ngas refer to this festival as *kwat*, while the Birom call it

jamo. It is important for *kwat* to come after the harvest and before cropping, a period when men have leisure time for hobbies such as cotton spinning, cloth weaving, hat and mat making, thatching, etc. Certain high priests are entrusted with the duty of performing the hunting rites in the respective polities. Women are warned three days prior to the festival to start brewing beer. On the festival day, the high priest mounts his horse and rides to the customary spot for performing hunting rites, *chan kwat* in the company of other elders. Prayers are offered to the deities and ancestors for a successful hunting year. Fire is then made by friction, *piyor wus*. The rite involves the rubbing of a soft wooded stick against a hard one, by holding the soft stick between two hands and twisting it at high speed over a small hole made on a flat hard one. The former represents masculinity and the phallus and the former symbolises femininity and the vagina. Fire is then set to the bush which is dry by this time of the year. Hence the need for *kwat* to come before the harvest, not after. In Mwaghavul, some polities like Bwai and Ruf make it mandatory for old women to shave the hair from their heads during *kwat*, because hunting is considered a sacred rite.

Chadic-speakers co-ordinate and celebrate *kwat* from one polity to the other in a strict order which has been handed down more clearly by the Mwaghavul. Thus while *mostar*, the beer festival of the moon (or harvesting festival) of the Ngas is more famous in Amper, *kwat*, hunting festival assumes that position among the Mwaghavul, communities where each has a distinct name and period. The Mwaghavul *kwat*, hunting festivals follow this strict order: The first is *Wus* festival of Pianiya (Panyam), then *Riyem* festival of Pushit, *Tiduu* festival of Kombum, *Kopshuu* festival of Npang (Ampang West), *Dilen* festival of Bwai/Ruf, *Alagham* festival of Alagham, *Mugo* festival of Mangu and the last being *Bwanzuhum* festival of Kerang/Kopal. Those of the Mangun, Chakfem and Jipal do not fall in line with these. Like in the Bache, Afizare, Irigwe and Birom, Mwaghavul *kwat* festivals are colourful and are marked by horse racing. The preparations for hunting are the same as those for war. *Kwat* lasts up to the beginning of cropping in April. The hunting festival is celebrated in two phases; the first constituting the actual hunting in the bush, which lasts from morning to afternoon. When the men return with the kill in the afternoon, women, girls, children and the elders come out in colourful dresses and begin *Kok/tam Kwat*, the hunting dance. This begins the second phase, which will go on throughout the night celebrated by dancing, singing, horse racing, eating of *Kwaklik*, a species of large beans, *kusuk*, *fonio* meal and meat and the drinking of beer and gruel.

The hunting season, *tar kwat* is also a time of great social events, such as night dances, parties, romance and adventure. It is a period of exchange of gifts between friends of both genders. Invitations to sumptuous dinners, especially of chicken or goat meat with *kwaklik* are organised on a reciprocal basis according to age grades known as *gwom shaar*, friendship meals. Mature girls may eat this meal for the last time as girls. After Bwanzughum hunting festival, among the Mwaghavul, they could be way laid, kidnapped or stolen as brides, while others may elope with their grooms. This is because Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau practice wife-stealing, bride kidnapping and elopement, with little or no room for any grandiose formal marriage or wedding rites.

Biyang Fwan, Rain Making

The Mupun and Mwaghavul refer to rain making as *biyang fwan*, piercing rain; *ya fwan*, catching rain; *kaat fwan*, meeting for rain; or *pun fwan*, chasing rain out of hiding, but the Mwaghavul of Mangun refer to it as *foyen*, throwing away medicine. *Biyang fwan* is not an annual event, but is resorted to only in a year of drought, *yi puus chan*, which could bring about famine or provide conditions conducive for the breeding of small pests, known as *nambur* and *yilambul* that destroy crops. *Byang fwan* is a communal affair among Chadic-speakers. Rain making rites are the closest rites to instituting a direct worship of *Naan*, God in their societies, because it is the only ritual where *Naan*, God is directly called upon to act in mercy and save the people from total annihilation. The Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau have no direct worship for God. Rain-making is the closest religious rite they have to the institution of direct worship of the Supreme Deity, *Naan*.

There are some extended families among Chadic-speakers who possess the secret medicines, *yen* for making rain. The rain-maker, *ngu-byang-fwan*, also called *pobang* by the Mwaghavul of Mangun, is a *mishkom kum*, the chief priest of a deity and *Pa* diviner, medicine man, *ngu yen* and a man of *zari/potur*, intuitive powers in his own right. The rite of *byang fwan*, rain-making is a post divinatory one. Chadic-speakers conduct thorough village by village, clan by clan and extended family by extended family *Pa* divination rites to know the cause of lack of rain, and purify the land through *tok kum*, sacrificial redressive rites before the rain-maker is called upon. The Ngas, as already observed above conduct the rites of *gwim*, oath taking and covenant making, affirming that they will not sin again, so that rain may come.

Rain is not made for pleasure, but it is brought about by an emergency where the *mishkom yil*, priest chief sends for the rain-maker to come and make rain to save natural phenomena, humans and animals from perishing. On arrival, he is officially apprised of the drought situation which is already known to him. The chief may address him thus, "shall we bury the people alive? Shall we wait to die as a people? You who cause the drought must speak (referring to witches and sorcerers). You must be cursed if you refuse to speak". It is believed that witches, *sot* cause drought by suspending an invisible tray *hitit* between the sky and the earth, thereby blocking rainfall. It is also believed that sorcery, injustice, immorality — especially adultery and incest, shedding of innocent blood, unjust wars and many such sins may be the causes of drought and other natural catastrophes.

The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker sets a date not too far away for *byang fwan*, rain-making after consulting his *Pa* divining pebbles. On the appointed day, the rain-maker secretly performs some rituals in which some herbs are secretly burnt to cause smoke. He then symbolically takes 'the disease of the drought', *muut*, composed of some medicinal substances, on the tip of his ritual spear. He does this in his capacity as medicine man with *zari/potur*, intuitive powers and *jyom*, the power of second sight; and leads the initiated male folk of the community, who gather for that purpose at the palace of the *mishkom*, priest chief, to a designated spot. This is usually marked by a brook, small holes in the ground covered by sacred broken pots, *yir/hgir*, flat stones or a stony pit, *junglughut*. Places used for *byang fwan*, rain-making must be a source of water which never dries throughout the year. The men march to the rain making spot, *pe byang fwan*, most on foot and some riding on their horses, the *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker being closely followed by a group of men, holding a spear each. These are the spear-men. At the spot, he sits down first, and all others follow suit, sitting far off, round the brook. He instructs some of his assistants to tie a local rain coat, *shilip* to a tree called *chilim*. He then points out the spot to be pierced by the spear-men. They are first asked to remove rotten leaves and dirt from the pit or brook. The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker then dips 'the disease of the drought', *muut* at the tip of the spear into the brook. The spear-men then scoop the water and throw it into the sky. The rain-maker provides some powdery medicine which he throws into the sky or he chews some herbs and spews the substance up towards the sky to induce rain. The spear-men are then asked to pierce, *byang* the rain spot with their spears. And everybody earnestly takes to his heels, shouting with joy and jubilation. The *ngu-byang-fwan*, rain-maker comes out first. In some cases, he goes into the brook alone, and in haste, while the

clan heads and their male folks watch the rites from far off. He recites some prayers and incantations in the form of magical formulas known to him alone. This is usually followed by a heavy downpour of rain reminiscent of the novella of Prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel (KGs. 18). Footmen are usually drenched by rain water. Only exceptionally good runners and the horsemen may escape the downpour.⁹

The people's confidence in the deity is unshakeable once the land has been purified through divination and post divination rites. The people have confessed their sins. Fines have been paid by wrong doers and the people have entered a covenant with the spirit realm after taking an oath not to repeat mistakes of the past. After these rites, the people see no reason why God and the gods will withhold rain from them. Thus both the rain-maker and the people act in absolute faith. This is demonstrated in their running home so that they will not be beaten by the rain they are expecting and their shouts for joy. The deity is appealed to directly. While water, rain-coat, *shilip*, spears and medicine (*yen*) are needed for *byang fwan*, the secrets of the art are fiercely guarded as family secrets. Thus the heads of the medicines, *ka yen-mo* used are never disclosed. The womenfolk then start a *chyer* dance in the down pour with their axes until they are completely drenched. In their joy, they embrace and welcome the life giving rain water.

Conclusion: The Importance of Songs and Dance in Calendrical Rites of Passage

The Chadic-speakers, like most other Africans, love to sing and dance. In the process of celebrating in the form of dance and songs, they celebrate religious rites and rituals. For the Chadic-speakers, *kok*, dance/music is not only the expression of feelings, emotions and anxieties; it is indeed a way of life. It is drama of performance, a novella where dances, songs on the one hand, and religious rites and rituals meet in complete harmony. Dancing and singing celebrate life itself. They celebrate life in crisis, in this case, the crises that come with seasonal changes which we denote here as calendrical rituals. The rites are performed together with accompanying songs and dances to cushion the crisis and pain that may come with the passage of each phase in the life of a human community and natural phenomena,

⁹ The author has witnessed such heavy downpours of rain on the day rain makers went out to make rain in Mupunland, but has never been at any venue where the rituals were performed.

such as that of fauna, flora, the seasons, and the whole life of the ecological-system.

However, we may ask the question, did rituals give birth to dance or did dance give birth to rituals? The answer is very clear. Africans have always performed the footlights of dancing and singing in a certain rigid or acceptable way which makes society to recognise its type. This is what we call ritual. The theatre of African dance has always been within the sphere of rituals; it is not haphazard in its performance. For instance, the importance of dance and music in African societies has been described thus by Olukoju (1987: 118),

[...] [M]usic is [a] language continuum for the expression of the mind in joy or in sorrow and in praise and thanksgiving. It is a vehicle for communicating thoughts and desires, and it also provide a forum for fellowship in corporate existence. Music-making could be in form of drumming, singing or dancing or a fusion of these in a musical setting in which some other non-membranophoneous musical instruments of the idiophone, the chordophone and the aerophone families feature as percussion to bring lustre to a performance.

Songs and dance have a prominent place in the religious life of the people, such as in the worship of the *Kum-mo*, deities and *nji-mo*, ancestors. Each divinity or cultic group has its own set of songs and chants. These songs and chants provide information about the history, theology, theogony and mythical experience of the people. The people express their desires, aspirations, joys, anxieties, hopes and frustrations in these songs and chants. They are a media for expressing inner religious experience and emotions. Music, dance and songs used in religious worship are an expressive language of the mind (cf. Nabofa 1990: 14, Olukoju 1987: 118). They celebrate life in joy and sadness, in life and in death, in the conquest of death as seen in the triumph of life after, that is, life after life.

Dance and songs celebrate the arrival of various seasons. Seasons are either welcomed with sombre reflections and low-keyed celebrations, as in the cropping festivals which prepare men, women and children for the hard farming season ahead, or with jubilation and joy, as in harvest. In the former, the emphasis is on the feasting — the eating and drinking which presage good health and strength for cultivating the land. Whereas in the former the emphasis is on dancing and young men may whip each other, as we have seen in *mostar*, harvesting festival of the Ngas and *pe kaat nji*, harvesting festival of the Mangun people. This is done in the belief that if one did not die through the difficult cropping season from fatigue, one can-

not die now in the midst of plenty and at any rate, a little more hardship (in the form of whipping) is still bearable with the harvest in sight.

Harvest festivals are thanksgiving rituals. In these festivals the people joyously thank the Supreme Divinity, the deities and ancestors for granting them a good harvest, good health, long life, plentiful sunshine and rainfall. Thus *Tenpe/Tempi*, the deity of fertility and harvest is usually at the centre of the harvesting festival dances and songs. The cropping festival in contrast takes the form of prayers to the spirit realm for good health, rainfall, sunshine, fertility and protection from hazards such as pests, drought, locust and deadly snake or scorpion bites.

The main aim of calendrical festivals, particularly those of the ancestors, is to harmonise both secular/profane time with sacred/ritual time frames. Calendrical festivals thus serve to link the world of the living with the spirit world of the ancestors and deities. This emphasises the fact that ritual time very frequently overlaps with secular time.

The festival of the masquerades helps the people to explain and bear the inevitable fact of death. In it, the pangs of death are exuded and accepted not only as a legitimate end to life but as a triumph of the living over death itself since it is now seen as the beginning of new life. This is sound psychology which removes the fear of death, since in death, there is (belief in the) continuity of life and rebirth. The festival demonstrates not only the conception that there is another 'life after this life', but it exhibits publicly that there is a close and active bond of historical, existential and ritual identity between the living and the living dead and that the former exists for the benefit of the latter. For the departed are consulted in times of affliction, crises and traumas. The spirits of the departed are believed to manifest themselves in the form of masquerades, *nwong*, that is the spirit of the living dead to share in physical fellowship and communion with their living relatives on earth through the sharing of meals, drinking of beer, dancing and singing. The masquerades thus serve as the cross-roads between the living and the living dead. At the end of each festival of the ancestors, it is believed that all the masquerades return to 'heaven', *bid'r/shiblang* with the messages of the living (cf. Aremu 1983: 47). Masquerades, though mystified in the eyes of women and children serve the purpose of shielding them from danger in times of emergencies, such as during attacks by enemies, wild animals, etc. Thus when the masquerades appear with dust in the air and shouts of their peculiar cries, women and children must go into hiding. This mystery also serves to reduce casualties, moreover, with them out of the way, the men can tackle the real problem at hand. Furthermore, if it happens that some men die in the process, or they

falter and fail in the face of crisis either due to cowardice or grave mistakes, the women and children will not be there to witness it. Thus, the art of masquerading gives the men room to manoeuvre and manipulate situations to their own favour. Thus after recovering, the men would prefer to tell their own version of events to the women, doubtlessly leaving out the not so palatable parts. This is because it is considered dishonourable for a woman to see the weakness of a man at such critical moments as these (cf. Wambutda 1980)

The living receive psychological satisfaction in three areas from the dances and songs during the festivals of the ancestors. Firstly, they receive the ritual satisfaction that they have performed their duty in maintaining a righteous and balanced relationship vertically between them and the spirit realm and horizontally among themselves. Having executed their duties to both the 'gods' and human beings, nothing can possibly go wrong. Moreover the ancestors are physically in their midst. And if something did go wrong, the spirit realm will very unlikely be blamed for it. It will be the fault of the witches and sorcerers and persons with the evil eye. Secondly, it is a time as observed during *bwenene*, the Mupun festival of the dead for venting frustrations and exuding pangs of death and anger for departed ones. The people sing, dance, laugh, cry, get angry, get drunk and sober again at different times during the rituals of this festival. Finally, it is a time to send messages to their loved ones in the spirit land, *yil nji* and be assured that such messages are carried. The living thus receive psychological comfort in the knowledge that messages shouted to the ancestors will surely be conveyed to their departed loved ones. The ritual of masquerading, *nwong* here thus plays the vital role of defusing the grief and shock of losing a loved one and removes the fear of death itself. At the end of it all, death is absolutely defeated and removed, since the dead continue to live after death — this group is what we refer to as the living dead. Moreover, the living dead can be reborn in a number of children. Thus rites as exhibited in the drama of dance, and dance as exemplified in rituals serve various purposes in the life of the Ngas, Mupun and Mwaghavul Chadic-speakers of the Jos Plateau in Nigeria.

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