

GENEALOGICAL DISCONTINUITY AND RECONTINUITY IN Hidkala ORAL TRADITIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being a universal feature of human cultures and societies, it is most likely that groups of people who share traditions of common genealogical descent, no matter how they are socially organised in a particular case, tend to worry about the continuity of their descent group. Not surprisingly in oral traditions, therefore, tales of genealogical origin and continuity are often set against tales of genealogical discontinuity, i.e. extinction of a descent group. The two processes may be linked, however, in orally transmitted ethnohistorical accounts, when a “survivor” of genealogical disruption of a particular descent group becomes adopted into another descent group and, eventually, starts a new descent group within the host community and, thereby, begins a new story of genealogical continuity (referred to here as “recontinuity”). In some cases, the new descent line may later expand at the expense of the original host group and finally replace it without, however, becoming identified with it, and definitely not taking over the particular supernatural powers and ritual duties of “owners of the ground” that go along with this cultural concept.

The paper is about ethnohistorical accounts of genealogical discontinuity and cases of recontinuity as told among the Hidkala people in north-eastern Nigeria and recorded by the author during fieldwork sessions in 1968–69 and 1973–74. Its original narrators, who were old men in their 70’s and 80’s at the time of recording, have all passed away long ago, as did the author’s principal field assistant, compiler and reteller of tales, the late Alhajji Abdullahi Ndaghra, who was himself a born and raised Hidkala man who later embraced Islam and throughout his life maintained a strong interest in and understanding attitude towards the pre-Islamic cultures and the languages of the area.

Basically, our recorded oral discourse materials show three recurring literary patterns that are being exploited in order to “explain” the coming about of

genealogical discontinuity (and, occasionally, of renewed continuity under adoption into a host group) that we will describe and illustrate in this paper:

- A group-internal curse following an atrocious incident affecting a “married-away daughter” in an exogamous group;
- Cultural ignorance (“stupidity”) in post-festum accounts by group-external commentators;
- The social integration of group-external cultural heroes who are in possession of supernatural (“magic”) powers or innovative technical skills (advent of iron technology).

The paper is purely descriptive and has no theoretical ambitions with regard to comparative anthropology. It aims at providing interesting illustrative empirical data of recurring motifs in orally transmitted episodes of story-telling geared at maintaining and strengthening group solidarity and shared cultural values among those who tell or listen to these stories. The paper is based on both extended periods of on-site observations and interviews regarding ethnolinguistic and ethnohistorical topics conducted through the medium of the local language, and on a linguistically sound understanding of the original oral discourse material which was recorded, analysed and translated in the field largely with the assistance of the late Alhajji Abdullahi Ndaghra.

In the first instance, however, the paper is a token of long-standing friendship and academic cooperation of the author with the eminent Finnish anthropologist-cum-linguist Arvi Hurskainen, to whom it is dedicated on the occasion of his retirement from the Chair of African Languages and Cultures at the University of Helsinki.

2. THE *Hidkala*: LOCATION, LANGUAGE AFFILIATION, RESEARCH HISTORY, CULTURAL FEATURES AND SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The *Hidkala* [*Xédkálá*] form part of several sociocultural groups in the Gwoza Emirate and the Gwoza Local Government Area of Borno State in north-eastern Nigeria who share a common language *gwàd'làamàŋ* (“our people’s language”).¹

¹ Proper names and original language material is rendered in a semi-standardised orthography adhering to the following graphic conventions: according to IPA usage *ɸ* and *ɗ* are glottalised oral stops, *ŋ* is a velar nasal stop. For di- and trigraphs: *gh* represents IPA *ɣ*, *sl* and *zl* represent IPA *ʃ* and *ʒ*, *dz* represents *dʒ*; *kw*, *gw*, *hw*, *ghw*, *ŋw* are monophonemic labialised obstruents, *mb*, *nd*, *ŋg* are monophonemic prenasalised stops. As for vowels, *ə* represents a non-phonemic central pro- or epenthetic vowel; double vowel symbols represent a long vowel involving morphemic contrasts (as in genitive marking and with some verbal extension suffixes). For pitch and tone marking: *accent aigu* represents high syllable pitch/tone, *accent grave* represents low pitch/tone, *accent circonflexe* represents a falling pitch/tone contour. Note that Lamang has a split prosodic system: syllable pitch is non-

The commonly accepted self-designation “Hidkala” refers particularly to the people settling in and around the villages of Ghadugum, Ghambakzla (Hambakda), and Vile south of Gwoza Town along the foothills of the Mandara Mountains that make up the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. People of different ethnic and linguistic background with whom they more or less regularly interact are manifold. Kanuri, Fulfulde and Hausa speakers (and various individuals using these languages as lingua francas of the area in past and present) may have some business in the area, yet their neighbours of long standing are the speakers of the following Chadic languages: Wandala (Mandara) and Malgwa (Gamergu), Glavda (Gelebda), Guduf (Kɔdupe), Dghwede, Gvoko (Ngweshe), and Margi, to a lesser extent also Hdi (Turu), Mabas (Vemgo), Sukur (Sakwun), and Higi varieties further south, around and beyond the town of Madagali.

The language of the Hidkala belongs to a dialect group referred to in the literature as Lamang (lit. “our people”), with yet unclear delimitations within what one might call a language continuum including Lamang in Nigeria, and Mabas and Hdi in Cameroon. These languages are tentatively grouped together with Wandala (Mandara), Malgwa (Gamergu), Podoko (Paduko), Glavda, Guduf, Dghwede and Gvoko within the so-called Wandala-Lamang Language Group of Central Chadic (subbranch A, acc. to the subclassification in Newman 1990).

The language has been quite well researched, priding itself on the availability of a monographic grammatical description (Wolff 1983). A dictionary, however, is still awaiting publication (Wolff in prep.). All fieldwork in the area carried out by the present author in 1968–69 and 1973–74, with subsequent short visits to the field between 1980 and 1982, was geared towards descriptive and comparative linguistic goals and purposes. It is, however, part of the German Africanist tradition to collect and make accessible as much text and discourse material as possible that would allow also non-linguist experts to gain insights into the culture and history of the speakers of the language under research. In keeping with this tradition, aspects of oral literature and verbal art have also been described in quite some detail, i.e. in a book length account of the aesthetics of proverbs and riddles (Wolff 1980). A larger account of oral wisdom, partially at least and with both original texts and annotated translations, has been made accessible through a book entitled *Our People's Own (Ina Lamaŋ). Traditions and Specimens of Oral Literature from GwaɗLamaŋ Speaking Peoples in the Southern Lake Chad Basin in Central Africa* (Wolff et al. 1994). The present paper draws on this book as its principal source and for references to the original language data.

distinctive on nouns, but tone is lexically and grammatically distinctive on verbs, ideophones, and on grammatical morphemes including prepositions. Stress is marginally contrastive and occurs only in the subgrammar of nouns.

The Hidkala people are traditional guinea-corn (sorghum) and millet farmers with small scale animal husbandry. They have come to embrace Islam since the early 1940s, and to a smaller extent Christianity since the late 1950s, but have maintained many aspects of their traditional life and religious practices. Some items of their material culture are referred to in Wente-Lukas (1977), based on a systematic ethnographic collection by the present author for the Frobenius-Institute in Frankfurt on Main.

In terms of social identity and cohesion, traditionally there is no shared feeling of ethnic unity or identity among all speakers of their common language, so there is no social or even political cohesion among all of them – even though the launching of the first book ever to be published in their language in 1992, *Ina Lamang*, containing transcriptions of the texts that are also published as part of Wolff et al. (1994), appeared to create a sense of an all-encompassing identity which became manifest in the creation of an accredited *Lamang Development Association*. (This was probably the first administrative act in which the term “Lamang” was ever used for official identification purposes in Nigeria.) Traditionally living in more or less scattered compounds amidst their millet and sorghum fields, the people recognise, first of all, common patrilineal descent with regard to what shall be referred to here as lineages and clans.

By clan I designate the highest order of social cohesion based on common patrilineal descent. The clan founder is remembered by name as a male individual and often shows mythological characteristics. Lineage would be the section of clan which also recognises one common ancestor in patrilineal descent who himself descended from the clan founder, and is usually remembered well as a “real” person. Lineage and clan solidarity forms the basis of the Hidkala social system, and members of the same lineage or clan tend to settle within sight over adjacent territory. The lineage which outnumbered the other lineages of the same clan (referred to as *gàdèghèl*) takes over the function of the leading group; their representative is accepted as a kind of leader (*ámghàm*) of the clan – the fact notwithstanding that these are fundamentally acephalous societies. Lineages and clans not connected by common descent may, however, form temporary or stable alliances. The people who refer to themselves as “Hidkala” are members of this type of cross-genealogical permanent alliance, i.e. they represent different clans and distinct yet adjacent settlement areas.

3. SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE Hidkala KINSHIP SYSTEM AND THE SPECIAL STATUS OF MARRIED WOMEN

In this paper, reference will be made to the peculiar and double-sided nature of the role of married women in patrilineal descent systems like that of the Hidkala. In

order to better understand this role, I will repeat here some ethnosociological information; for details cf. Wolff et al. (1994: 383–397, Appendix F: Notes on the Hə̀ɖkàla kinship system and glossary of kinship terms).

I shall use the term clan to refer to the highest relevant unilineal descent unit, followed by the hierarchical level of lineages. In certain instances it may, however, be considered useful from a descriptive point of view to introduce the intermediate levels of subclan and/or sublineage. Lower levels of social organisation relate to household units and subunits within a household.

I am not sure that there is one particular *gwàd'làamàŋ* term for clan, if so it is probably *mbòlò*. The same notion appears to be also conveyed by the following terms which occur more frequently in the recorded discourse material, *mbòlò* having been found to be rarely used.

Dzə̀bà – the Hausa equivalent appears to be *dangi* “kin, family relations” in terms of being a social group comprising of consanguine relatives more than four to five generations ascending as well as in terms of reference to an exogamous unit.

Zivə̀li – in combination with the name of the mythological or real founder, e.g. *zivə̀lāa Sə̀rghò*, which translates into Hausa as *zuriya* “offspring, descendant”. *Zivə̀li* includes any direct male and female descendants of anybody (male or female) and is not originally a kinship term. As a kinship term, however, it can only refer to Ego’s unilineal descendants, i.e. consanguine relatives in descending generations.

The term *húlfá*, translated into Hausa as *iri* “seed, kind”, is at times used in the same sense as *zivə̀li*, but I am under the impression that this term can also be used to include affinal relatives living among the clan members.

Lám̀bò – “people of kin” in an extension of its supposed original usage to refer to what we shall call lineage.

We use the term clan to describe a patrilineal descent group of male and female offsprings of a given male clan founder who is known by name but clearly shows mythological traits and is not necessarily a historical person. The clan is also a local group since clan members tend to settle together. The subclan level is usually not a functional unit in the social system. Rather, one generation descending, the sons of the clan founder usually become founders of highly functional units which I refer to as lineages. The lineage is also a local group since members of the same lineage tend to settle together. Lineage membership is linguistically encoded in the construction type *lá-ŋ-[name]* (“people belonging to the descent group of [name]”). When speaking of a lineage, reference is normally only to the consanguine male members of an exogamous group, since the spouses are not members of the lineage, and grown-up daughters are normally no longer

living with them because they have married away and live with their husbands elsewhere. As a social group in general, i.e. without reference to a particular name, Ego may refer to his or her lineage as *lám̀b̀ò*, lit. 'people of kin'; this will usually be in a construction involving the possessive pronoun, e.g. *lám̀b̀àà d̀á* "my kinfolk". (By extension, as it will appear, *lám̀b̀ò* may also refer to Ego's whole clan.) The noun *lám̀b̀ò* is most probably a compound of *lá-* (as in the construction used for lineage designation, cf. above) and *-mb̀ò*, which most likely is etymologically related to a word meaning "house, compound" (**mb̀wa* ?) that is no longer actively used in the Hidkala variety of Lamang, but which may also form part of the above mentioned term *mb̀òl̀ò*, and is definitely contained in the compound kinship terms referring to certain affinal relatives (as in *d̀àd̀àmb̀ò* "father-in-law" and *m̀ám̀ám̀b̀ò* "mother-in-law"); cf. also fn. 2.

The descriptive term *dz̀ə̀b̀à*, i.e. lineage or clan, identifies an exogamous unit of legal relevance. Incestuous marriages within this group are forbidden and members must not kill each other. Marriage preference is given to matrilineal cousins, both cross- and parallel cousins. Ego is not supposed to marry a girl whom he could refer to as *m̀ákẁáa lám̀b̀àà d̀á* ("girl/daughter of my kin/lineage/ clan").

Married women belong to two sets of social groups. They belong, first of all, to their own patrilineal descent group as *m̀ákẁá* "daughter" (irregular pl. *úzin-kúghì*; cf. *úziná* "[male] children"); as *m̀arákẁá* "wife" (irregular pl. *mihá*, pleonastically also adding the regular pl. suffix *-há*: *miháhá*) she also becomes a member of her husband's group, following the rule of virilocal postnuptial residence. There is parallel ambiguity in the usage of the terms *lá-ń-[name]* and *lám̀b̀ò*. In addition to its clear reference to unilineal patrilineal descent (lineage), it may also be used in a non-descent group sense, for instance, when a married woman talks about the members of her husband's household: she may refer to them as *lám̀b̀àà d̀á* "my people, my kinfolks" (from *lám̀b̀ò*), whereas normally this expression would refer to her own patrilineal descent group. If she wishes to restrict reference to her consanguine core family, i.e. her parents and her brothers and sisters with whom she grew up as a child, she will use the expression *lá-ń-d̀àà d̀á* ("kinfolks of my father"). This expression, however, is again ambiguous since it may also include anybody living in her father's compound at a given time, consanguine relative or not. Possibly and quite likely, ambiguities are dissolved by context.

This leads us to the rather low level social group of the household (*h̀éghà* and *t̀éghà*, both meaning "compound"). These, however, are not necessarily kinship terms denoting a particular descent group, but may be used as such. Again, a married woman who lives with her husband is a member of two *t̀égha*'s, namely her husband's and her father's (cf. *t̀éghà ń̀ d̀ini* "house of the descent group of her father"), the latter clearly bearing reference to patrilineal descent.

The double status of a married woman is reflected in the two designations that apply to her. From the view of her own patrilineal descent group she has become a *mákw-tá-lwá* (“girl/daughter on the [other] settlement”), and from the perspective of her husband’s descent group she is a *márákwá* (“wife”). She shares all rights as a woman in the group of her husband, just that she will not be let in on secrets that concern the political relationship between the two groups to which she belongs. She would be expected to convey all secrets to her original descent group! Within her own descent group, her status as *mákw-tá-lwá* gives her special magico-religious powers, namely the destructive power of *slòpò*, i.e. “cursing (consanguine relatives)”, and the constructive power of *slòpòlò*, i.e. “blessing (consanguine relatives)”. Whatever she will say in a given ritualised manner of expression, it will come true – in the case of *slòpò* it will be to the detriment of her own kin (cf. below for examples and illustrations). But also as *márákwá* a woman has at least part of this power in her husband’s group, i.e. *slòpò* power. However, this power she has only when she enters her husband’s group as a *márákwá bèzè*, i.e. as a *virgo intacta* in a first marriage. If she is going to curse her husband’s group, then her *slòpò* will be encapsuled in the following verbal frame which makes reference to *bàdzigà*, the particular premarital adornment that young Hidkala women used to wear dangling between their buttocks in the old days:

Yó, láŋz dā̀lā̀d,
vitá kàghèŋé kwtsàgáat bādzigà skwé́d t́́ st́́ mí-y(ó) ná,
má ... [slopo] ... ká́lá!

Yo, kinfolks of my husband,
 since it is you who took away the *bādziga* from my bottom,
 may (God) ... [curse] ... amen!

Interlinear translation:

Yó, lá-ŋ-z-dā̀l-ā̀a-d(ā̀),
Yo, people-COLL-husband-GEN-POSS.1SG

vitá kàghèŋ-é kwtsà-g-ā̀a-t bādzigà
 because ABS.2PL-FOC grab-EXT:by.force-EXT:hither-VN *bādziga*

skwé́-d t́́ st́́ mí-y(ó) ná,
 come-EXT:down PREP:on bottom for-1SG SUB

má ... [slopo] ... ká́lá!
 OPT ... [curse] ... amen!

It is quite obvious that the *slòpò* power of a *márákwá* helps to establish a kind of security for her in the new group and prevents her from being ill-treated. On the

other hand, this same power of a *mákw-tá-lwá* may reflect a kind of collective bad conscience of the descent group to “give away” one of their kin to a foreign group and thus lose control over her, it also ensures that they will not forget any of their married-away daughters and deprive her of her spiritual ties with her *dzə̀bà*. The danger of risking a *slòpò* curse by one of their daughters is nicely compensated for by attributing *slòpòlò* power to her which makes her even more important; *slòpòlò* also reflects the closer ties which she has with her descent groups in comparison with her husband’s group.

4. MIGRATIONS AND GENEALOGICAL CONTINUITY, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CONCERNS ABOUT FERTILITY AND POWER

When recording and transcribing myths, legends, and the history of origin and migration during fieldwork, the following picture emerged:

There are as many stories of origin and migration into present habitats as there are identifiable descent groups... The accounts document the complex ethnic and cultural amalgamation which is found in the Gwoza area... There has been a constant influx of foreign ethnic and cultural elements into a densely populated preexisting network of interethnic and intercultural relations. There may be many instances where the older ethnic units have since been replaced by more recent ethnic units which largely came into being through continuous integration of immigrants. The immigrants, whether individuals or small groups, were assimilated linguistically and, largely, culturally as well, so that the language and the culture of a particular area was able to survive irrespective of the continuous ethnic change-over which took place over the time, largely due to interethnic marriage arrangements and integration of strangers. This may also account for the relatively small differences in material culture between neighbouring ethnico-linguistic units as, for instance, the *gwáɗ láamàŋ* speaking Hidkala and their immediate neighbours on top of the mountains, the Dghwede speaking groups and the Kə̀dupe speaking groups. (Wolff et al. 1994: 147)

Many of the observed and recorded religious practices are related to the notion of genealogical continuity. This is particularly true for the spiritual communication with genealogical ancestors which is symbolised in ritual activities by particular clay pots (such as *də̀ghùm* and *ghùmbàlám* pots in, for instance, rituals related to a male’s *dàdà* “father”, *dzìdzì* “grandfather”, and *zə̀gə̀ftò* “great-grandfather”, but also *kádùrà* for a woman’s grandmother in the female line). It is also true for prayers for the fertility of crops (e.g. by performing the *dáɗ tsúfá* rituals connected with the consumption of the first crops of a new harvest), and the fertility of animals and humans. It is not surprising to note, therefore, that doubling the product of fertility, like the birth of twins (*máhwíli*, also symbolised by clay pots in worship activities) is a highly marked event in cultural life. Interesting to note is the fact that not only males perform fertility-related rituals in what can be referred to as a system of unilineal descent in the male line, but also women (cf. *kádùrà* above, and a special fertility festival for women called *kúrndzùm*). Further,

most of the big festivals in the course of the agricultural year, such as the bull festival (*ǝghǝŋ*) and the community festivals of *kábákàbà* and *káfálá*, appear to relate to the fertility and survival of the descent group, i.e. genealogical continuity. The fertility, growth, and wellbeing of the descent group is symbolised by a big tree, referred to as *hálóló*, at whose roots certain rituals are performed in order to assure the continuity of the group.

The major concerns of the group are reflected, for instance, in the following prayer of the elders quoted in connection with the *dziɖzi* (“grandfather”) ritual. The prayer is directed towards *Dàdám̀bàŋ* (“our father”),² the pre-Muslim and pre-Christian God that prayers are commonly addressed to (Wolff et al. 1994: 51, 248): the prayer concerns the continuity of the worshipping community, the correct performance of the ritual itself, the fertility of humans and animals, and incorrect conduct of group members.

Dàdám̀bàŋ,
mà v̀̀r̀̀àkà dz̀̀r̀̀nìŋt̀̀à m̀̀ndàná gùl̀̀éŋ d̀̀álùẁ̀à!
Gùl̀̀éŋ, mà kól̀̀ tàkẁ̀alátá sk̀̀unà, k̀̀ǎlá!
M̀̀à k̀̀àẁ̀um̀̀ d̀̀ùgh̀̀úl̀̀há t̀̀ó m̀̀ih̀̀áhá toy t̀̀' úz̀̀àŋ,
Ǹ̀d̀à gùl̀̀éŋ mà k̀̀àg̀̀èl̀̀ tá l̀̀m̀án k̀̀ád̀̀à!
Gùl̀̀éŋ, úz̀̀àŋ̀̀à tàdz̀̀ág̀̀à ǹ̀d̀à t̀̀p̀̀às̀̀ t̀̀è m̀̀arákẁ̀áa dz̀̀èb̀̀à
Ǹ̀d̀à gùl̀̀éŋ tàgh̀̀ilì - úk̀̀ǎlá d̀̀ḗ ñ̀̀ nd̀̀èr̀̀ d̀̀f̀̀yè!

Dadambaŋ,
 may you gather us like this again next year!
 Also, may this sacrifice be without fail, amen!
 May the young men marry wives who bear children,
 And may also the wealth (in terms of domestic animals) grow to be
 plentiful!
 Also, a boy who causes trouble and chases a woman of the *dz̀̀èb̀̀à*
 And also steals – let he be taken by the buttocks!

² The term of address for the God of prayers (who is different from the Creator God) provides a challenging task for etymological and grammatical analysis. The term is made up of several morphemes and derives from *d̀̀ád̀̀à* “father”. It further contains the element *-mba-* which, in the so-called collective type associative construction, is used with possessive pronouns to relate possession to an owner as member of a particular social group rather than to the owner as an individual. In the shape of *-mb̀̀àŋ*, however, this is a highly idiosyncratic possessive pronoun of “1st pers. pl. collective inclusive”, probably a contraction from *-mb̀̀à-* plus *-m̀̀àŋ* “1st pers. pl. incl.” of the regular possessive pronoun set. The etymological source of the morpheme *-mb̀̀à-* is a word for “house, compound” that has reflexes in several neighbouring languages, but as such does not exist in Lamang. Interestingly, there is a certain parallel in the common Hausa term of address for God, namely *Ubangiji*, which can be analysed as *uba-n giji* “father-of the house” and which is also used in the prayers of Christians.

Interlinear translation:

Dàdàmbàŋ

God (father-of.our.group)

mà vərə-ká dzərə-ni-ŋ-tà mǎndá-nà gùléŋ dǎlùwà
 OPT return-2SG assemble-1PL.EXCL-EXT:in-VN like-DEM:this also next.year

Gùléŋ mà kól tà-kwàlá-tá skù-nà kǎlá
 also OPT without ITER-fail-VN ritual-DEM:this amen

Mà kà-wùm dùghúl-há tɔ mihá-h-áa to-y t' úzàŋ
 OPT REP-marry young.man-PL OBJ women-PL-GEN ITER-give.birth OBJ child

Nà gùléŋ mà kà-gèl tá lmán kádà
 and also OPT REP-grow OBJ wealth plenty

Gùléŋ úzàŋ-áa tà-dzágà ndà t-pès tɛ mǎrákw-áa dzəbà
 also child-GEN ITER-fight and ITER-search OBJ woman-GEN descent.group

Nà gùléŋ tà-ghili
 and also ITER-steal

ú-kǎá-dɛ ɲ ndər-ɔ-yè
 EXT:auto-ben-take-3SG]SUBJ PREP:in buttocks-COP

Another concomitant notion connected to the genealogical continuity of the descent group is *gàdəghəl*, which relates to issues of political power and control in what are traditionally acephalous societies: A descent group has become *gàdəghəl* when it outnumbers other descent groups in terms of male offsprings. (Note that in northern *gwàd'làamàŋ* speaking groups this term appears to have been attributed the meaning of “leader, chief”.)

5. ORAL TRADITIONS RELATING TO GENEALOGICAL DISCONTINUITY

In the following three subsections, we will look at instantiations of three motifs that recur in the recorded oral traditions relating to genealogical discontinuity and recontiguity. We will provide translations of the original texts only; the original transcriptions can be found in Wolff et al. (1994).

5.1 The “curse” (*slòpò*) motif

The following “curse” motif relating to the *slòpò* power of married women in an exogamous patrilineal society with virilocal postnuptial residence was encountered on several occasions during tales of local history in order to explain the sudden discontinuity of a descent group. It was retold in very much the same way every time it was heard, which, however, is not so surprising since the reported rather drastic “facts” are very clear and can be easily remembered and retold.

Interestingly, the same episode can be understood to also convey several other social and cultural meanings (directed at younger male members of the group), such as the following:

- Do not engage in idle talk and heated verbal arguments over nothing, whether or not under the influence of sorghum beer (*ghùzò*).³
- Respect female members of the exogamous *dzèbà* group, even though or rather because they have married away and suffer spiritual hardship by being forced to obey virilocal postnuptial residence rules, i.e. by tradition, to live away from home with their affinal relatives of their husband's lineage.
- Watch out for hidden powers that apparently weaker members of society may possess and use in self-defence, retaliation or revenge to the detriment of the aggressor, independent of shared genealogical bonds.

All this is built into the curse motif, embedded in the larger context of tales of origin and migration. The motif is exploited in oral traditions in order to explain genealogical discontinuity as the ultimate result of socio-cultural misconduct which may ultimately lead to the annihilation of a descent group. It can also be viewed as a manifestation of a collective feeling of guilt on the part of the patrilineal descent group that “gives away” their own flesh and blood by rules of exogamy, leaving them spiritually unprotected and at the mercy of the affinal relatives. The particular power to “curse” (vb *slapa*, vn *slopo*) particularly consanguine relatives that is enshrined in these young women may well be a cultural feature of metaphysical compensation.

The following particularly lively version of the episode involving the particular *slòpò* curse is taken from the tales relating to the in parts miraculous survival of a male individual by the name of Sərgho to become a very important clan founder within a scenario of migration, genealogical discontinuity and re-continuity, after his original descent group had been discontinued as a consequence of the curse at their original location in a place referred to by the name Mulgwi. The original version is found in Wolff et al. (1994: 148f., 299f.).

In Mulgwi the young men sat together in a palaver, when a girl-that-had-married-away went to the river to fetch water. Aki, the woman was pregnant. The young men started to argue. “This woman here, she will give birth to a boy!” Some said: “No, not a boy, a girl she will give birth to!” They argued. When the girl came close to their place they said to her: “Girl-that-has-married-away!” “Here I am,” said the girl. “We are having

³ Tasty but intoxicating beer made from sorghum used to be consumed heavily on various ritual occasions, and on market day (Wolff et al. 1994). Cf. also Eguchi (1975) for an extensive account of the role of beer drinking among the closely related Hide of Turu in Cameroon who culturally and linguistically belong to largely the same stock as the Hidkala.

an argument, whether you will give birth to a boy now, or is it a girl that you will give birth to now; among ourselves we are arguing about this: What is in your belly?" they said to her. Said the girl: "What do I know, my brothers? Only **Dadambaŋ** knows what is in my belly," she said. "**Aya**, if it is so, we shall cut you then!" "So you will cut me then, but before you cut me open, let me pray to **Dadambaŋ**!" She bent down, she put her hands to her neck and said: "**Dadambaŋ**, here am I with my brothers, nothing did I do to them. What is in my belly, you have put it into my belly. They are going to cut me open. When they have cut me, I do not know what you will bring here to destroy their kin (**hũlfá**). It may even shatter this big town, amen, since I am a married-away-daughter!" she said. [That is how]She cursed them. **Dørs!** They grabbed her and cut her. When they had cut her, **guzbara!** a boy child came out of her belly. Then they dispersed.

It did not take long when, **dorra!** dust came nearer. Whether it was the Kanuri people, or the Fulbe, whether it was war, one did not know. Then the whole town ran, the town fled in haste ...

The very well-behaved young woman in this episode did not even verbally fight her young male relatives. She quietly and properly prayed to God, stating her cause and sketching out the form of extreme punishment to God for the unjust and atrocious action about to happen. This was her *slòpò* curse. The tale goes on, mentioning clouds of dust to be seen at the horizon, usually a sign of marauding, slave-hunting and pillaging cavalry units of the Kanuri or Fulbe that left villages and towns in total destruction. The story implies, without giving any further details, that the town of Mulgwi was totally destroyed, and all inhabitants fled or were taken slaves, i.e. the girl's curse resulted in the almost complete annihilation of all local descent groups as such. How then did a man called Sərgħo manage to get away and survive to later reestablish the genealogical continuity of a new descent group in another place is another story that we will come back to later.

5.2 The "stupidity" motif

The "stupidity" motif is encountered, for instance, in a tale about the well known Dəghaha clan.⁴ Their ancestor Nguseme had come to be accepted as a cultural hero (cf. 5.3) among the Ruku host clan which later became extinct, i.e. at one time had no longer any living male members. Nguseme and his offsprings survived their host clan. Since there are no more descendents of Ruku around, the triumphant survivor groups may well mock and relate stories about Ruku's stupid, i.e. socially detrimental misconduct. They do this certainly not only to "explain" the extinction of the former Ruku clan, whose previous presence is still virulent in many place names and reported events of past local history, but also for pedagogical reasons. At least one lesson is to be learned from the reported fatal

⁴ The name of the clan means "the knowledgeable people" and refers to their skills and professional abilities as blacksmiths.

episode, namely that despite occasional good harvest years this cannot mean that one should give up efforts to secure food through maintaining regular and good farming. In the following tale, the Dəghaha behave wisely and continue farming even after a year of plenty, while the Ruku behave stupidly by skipping the next farming season in view of their exceptionally full granaries. Interestingly, but quite commonly so, motifs combine and enforce each other. In this particular account, the stupidity motif is enforced by the same *slòpò* curse motive introduced above by reference to another tale regarding a different clan altogether. But this time the girl's curse does not evoke military aggression as in the above mentioned case of Mulgwi, but she has her own people's stupidity turn fatally against them! The historical truth behind the tale may be that most male members of the Ruku clan did not survive one of the famines which repeatedly occurred in the past. It is further reported in the story below that at one point in time the only surviving male of Ruku descent was killed in a slave-raid by the Wandala (the Hidkala prefer the Kanuricized version of the ethnonyme: Mandara). The original version is found in Wolff et al. (1994: 154f., 303).

One year they had harvested a lot. The Ruku people said: "This year we shall not go to farm. This sorghum that we harvested last year, it will not be finished. What is the use of going to farm this year," they said. Then they sat together in the meeting place. When the rain came down to plant, they refused to plant. Only all the Dəghaha people planted. Before the year was over, all the sorghum in the granary was rotten. But the Dəghaha people, they had planted sorghum. Then hunger befell the country. One day they were sitting together in the meeting place, when a married-away-daughter went to the river to fetch water. They started quarrelling. Some said: "She will give birth to a boy!" Some said: "She will give birth to a girl!" And they slaughtered this girl, that married-away-daughter. Before they cut her open, she had cursed them. She cursed them saying: "May I, the girl, the married-away-daughter, (and my fate) join your fate; may your place be ruined, may this place be ruined, amen!" she told them. "May your whole kin (*húlfá*) be destroyed, too!" Before the year was over, the sorghum was spoilt – their sorghum, and they perished because of hunger. Only one man was left. When the Mandara came to conquer the Laman, they killed him. That was the end of the Ruku people; the Dəghaha people multiplied in Kamba.

5.3 The "magic power" motif and cultural heroes

Genealogical discontinuity would not be a big topic in oral traditions, one would suppose, if it were not for the miraculous cases of recontinuity as part of a host clan. In the old days (which seemed not to be over at the time of fieldwork, at least in several corners of the research area), unfriendly encounters with non-members of one's own descent group could easily result in the death of any of the participants through clubbing or the effect of poisoned arrows or spears. Being slain or adopted into a host clan were the basic options for a young male who was caught in the bush by members of another clan. The ticket to adoption, and to

being given a woman to marry and live with her like a clan member, i.e. near her father's compound, was a privilege that only a few could enjoy. One needed special talents, abilities, forces and powers that were unknown to and unheard of by the host clan. Quite often in the recorded texts, these talents and powers relate to iron reduction and the work of blacksmiths.

In the tale of Dəghaha ethnohistory we have already met their ancestor Nguseme, who is the only young man to survive a retaliatory ambush scheme by the Turu (Hdi) people. He fled, not forgetting to take his blacksmith tools along, and was picked up and kind of enslaved by members of the Ruku clan, who later so stupidly annihilated themselves as we learned in the previous section. As the story goes, the Turu had invited all the young men of the Dəghaha up to their place in the mountains for a drinking party. When the Dəghaha men were drunk, the Turu killed them. They then went down in order to kill the old men and children that the young men had been told to leave behind. The original version is found in Wolff et al. (1994: 154, 303).

But Nguseme escaped. He was hiding when they came down in order to kill the old people and the children. After the Turu people had returned, he buried his father in his courtyard farm (*káďákà*). Then he picked up his forging implements, e.g. tongs and hammer, so he picked them up. Then he came here to Kamba as an alien child of the Ruku people. Like a slave he lived.

In those days the Ruku people did not know the shaving of the head. So he forged a shaving knife (razor) and shaved them their heads. And he also forged a hoe and axes to clear the field and to hoe. "Thanks," said the Ruku people to Nguseme when they received the hoe and the axe to clear the fields, as well as the knife to shave the head. Therefore Ruku gave him his daughter in marriage. Their first son was Kəzlo, they say. They called him Kəzlo, son of Suguda. They knew Suguda better than Nguseme. Then the Dəghaha people slowly established themselves [i.e. as a recontinued lineage among the host clan of the Ruku people who, as we have already learnt, was doomed to discontinue because of their own stupidity, enforced by the curse of one of their married-away-daughters].

Interestingly, we learn that an "alien child", when adopted into the host descent group, could be linked to it by name through the mother (in this case *Suguda*, daughter of Ruku), which otherwise would be quite unusual in a patrilineal descent system. This option to adjust genealogical relationships, however, tends to confuse later generations, as is quite drastically illustrated in the dialogue among Hidkala elders that is published in Wolff et al. (1994: 4–29).

The Hidkala attribute a lot of magic power to *zàvà* (euphorbia), which they also use for divination purposes. It doesn't have to be the abilities and powers of a blacksmith that would make a foreigner attractive for a host clan to adopt him or make some profitable arrangements with him. The Kadzagwara people, for instance, trace their origin as a separate patrilineal descent group to a male child by that name that was already conceived by his pregnant mother, when she, in turn,

was picked up with another baby boy on her back by Ngade, the legendary ancestor of many of the old lineages in the area, among them the Ruku and Mighwa (cf. below), among others. The original version of the following tale is found in Wolff et al. (1994: 156, 304).

Ngade was coming from Mandara when he met a pregnant woman with a baby boy on her back on the way. He brought her home. Then he sold that boy; the mother he left to be his wife. Then she gave birth to a boy child with *zàvà* in his fist when coming out of the belly: Kadzagwara was to be his name. He planted that *zàvà* on top of where one had buried his mother.

Meanwhile Kadzagwara grew up until he was a man. He [i.e. Ngade] called him one day, he showed him that *zàvà* with which he had been born from the belly. That is why the Kadzagwara people value so much *zàvà* from that time until today.

We are told a bit later that the Kadzagwara people were particularly trusted by their half-brothers, the Ndzaroyo people (another of the lineages that relate back to Ngade as the clan founder), who eventually handed over the leadership to them rather than to any of their full brothers. Or was it because they feared the power of the *zàvà* that the Kadzagwara are supposed to possess?

The magic *zàvà* also plays an important role in the rich mythology surrounding the recontinuity of the old clan from Mulgwi through Sərgho, whom we already met in section 5.1. We remember that the town of Mulgwi was shattered, and all people fled as a result of the curse of the married-away-daughter. A man named Goto and his family fled from Mulgwi and turned towards the Mandara Mountains near Gwoza. Goto was in possession and command of magic powers, such as *zàvà* and other things. However, he died on the way, and the group of refugees from Mulgwi dissolved there and then; individual members then became founders of various new clans in the whole area along the slopes and on top of the mountains. Sərgho was Goto's principal heir and took over the magic powers after he had buried his father. Continuing his way towards the mountains with one of his brother, they were caught by members of the related lineages of Mighwa and Dəgane. The Dəgane slew Sərgho's brother; he himself was fortunate to become adopted into the Mighwa host lineage. This lucky fate he owed to his special talents which Mighwa (also called Ighwa at times) soon began to realise. Sərgho's speciality was telekinesis, i.e. he could make things and people freeze in motion, and he could change substances. The following three episodes from Sərgho's tale will illustrate this. The original version is found in Wolff et al. (1994: 150ff, 300ff).

In the first episode, their village Ghambakzla is once again attacked by Mandara horsemen who regularly appear after harvest times to pillage the compounds and drive away cattle and capture people. Sərgho freezes them on the ground for three days, then allows one of the horsemen to return home to the

Sultan of Mandara to bring as ransom exactly the number of horses, people and goods with which they had invaded Hidkala. This is obviously the first time Mighwa to witness Sørgho's telekinetic powers, for Mighwa still thinks of Sørgho as a "thing" that his sons had picked up in the bush and brought home and whom they could have slain like the Dəgane did with Sørgho's brother.

One day the Mandara people came to attack Ghambakzla. He had sat at his master's place, Ighwa. "They are catching it. They are driving the cattle," said Sørgho. "Master, master! What are they doing?" he said. "They are catching cattle and people!" said Sørgho. "From where are those people?" said Sørgho. "They are the Mandara," said Mighwa. "Where will they go with it?" said Sørgho. "They are able to take it away because they are stronger than we." "If it is so, may I hinder them?" said Sørgho. "Stop them, if you are able to stop them!" said Mighwa. "Oho," said he. "Stand!" he said to them. **Cip!** The horses all stood still. People didn't put forward their feet, horses didn't put forward their feet. For three days they were standing. Said the leader among the Mandara people: "What shall we do?" Sørgho said to his master: "Let them go. Let them send a man on that white horse. Let them bring exactly the amount of things and horses which they have brought, and the same amount of people who came on horses, may they collect it and come and give it to you first – then I shall give them permission to go home." The Mandara were told so. He told it to one horseman. When he had told him: "Go!" he said, and the horse went because of his magic power. The horse went home to Mandara ...

The plan worked, the Sultan of Mandara felt compelled to pay the ransom, and Sørgho released the Sultan's cavalry. Mighwa was only too happy: he was very rich now, and he had this powerful young man at his side. He was once more glad that his children had not slain Sørgho when they had caught him in the bush. So the tale goes on as follows, culminating in the recontinuity of a new Sørgho descent line when Mighwa gave him his daughter Katala in marriage.

Said Mighwa: "Well, a wonderful thing I have; thanks to my children. If they had killed it, I would not have gotten this wealth. See, he freed me (from the Mandara) and got for me wealth. Ah, I'd better keep this thing!" So they kept Sørgho there. He even gave him his first daughter Katala. He gave her to him as a wife. Then he built a compound near the door. "Look, here is your wife, sit down!" So he sat down with his wife.

In the second episode, Sørgho accompanies his master and now father-in-law Mighwa to a beer drinking occasion held uphill in the Dghwede village of Kurana. Not being a fully recognised member of Mighwa's descent group, the Dghwede don't accept him on the same footing as Mighwa and treat him ill by serving him not proper beer, but a poor mixture of beer sediment and water. Sørgho angrily uses his magic powers, and in addition to his well known telekinetic powers we find mention of a familiar motif of changing liquid substances (not water into wine, in this case, but beer into blood). The Dghwede are impressed, and soon Sørgho even consents to provide them with some of his magic power. There is a clear message encapsulated in this episode, namely to

explain and foster the traditional friendship and alliance between Hidkala and the Dghwede of Kurana.

One day Mighwa said: "I go to drink beer in the house of my friend among the Dghwede in Kurana. Let's both go!" he said to him. They went up with that bag on the shoulder with those euphorbia inside and the magic things. When they had gone up, they poured sediment and water into a calabash and gave it to him. They didn't give him the beer. The Dghwede people were drinking the beer with his master. **Dghun!** wrath came up in him. In his magic power he said: "Beer, don't come out!" Those people wanted to drink the beer – the beer didn't come out. They wanted to open the calabash on top of the beerpot, the calabash was irremovable! The master said: "What goes on?" "The beer is being opened, (but) it doesn't open!" "Well, open it (and) pour!" he said to him. Then his master poured it down and gave him to drink. Also he poured him(self) some. Said the Dghwede people: "A'a, whose magic is this?" "Well, you take out some!" he told the Dghwede people. The Dghwede people couldn't get it. "Well, take it out!" he said. The Dghwede poured it down, **luḍuḍa!** (out came) blood. "Pour it down into the beerpot!" he told them. They poured it down. "Take it out again!" he said. They poured it out: pure beer. "You may drink!" he said. Then the Dghwede drank. When the Dghwede had finished the beer, the Dghwede people said: "Look, this thing here is a wonderful thing. My friend, from where did you get this thing here?" they said to Mighwa. "Ah, he is my friend. He is living at my place," he said. "Please, this man here is not a useless man. There are the Matakam people troubling us, perhaps there is a magic power with this man and he will help us," so they said to him. "One will see."

The episode is completed when Sərgho finally agrees to provide the Dghwede of Kurana with some magic implements, i.e. a horn stuffed with some secret things which was said to be still kept by the Kurana villagers until the day of recording that story. Further on in the tale, Sərgho is then told to have served as a wise advisor to other lineages related to his host Mighwa, and the tale ends with yet another small token of his powers:

In Sərgho's time, whatever thing the Ngalwa and Dəghaha people at Ghdawa will do, he will advise them. Even if a small chicken is taken by a bird, "Come down!" says Sərgho and it will fall down. Because of those euphorbia his father had collected. Whatever he says, it will become true at once.

6. CONCLUSION

In this paper we set out to provide some illustrative examples of how the genealogical continuity of unilineal descent groups is topicalised in oral traditions on ethnohistory in north-eastern Nigeria by a group of speakers of the Lamang language. The examples were set against the background of a particular kinship system that strongly focuses on the integrity and identity of unilineal patrilineal descent groups which function as the major social groups in the society. On the other hand, members of these unilineal descent groups appear to show a special metaphysical concern about the double-sided nature of the spiritual position of

married women with regard to their consanguine and affinal relationships under the rules of exogamy and virilocal postnuptial residence.

Three motifs were highlighted that were used in the tales to explain the genealogical discontinuity of unilineal descent groups and, in some cases, their recontiguity as new sublineage within a host lineage, or new lineage in a host clan. These motifs were (a) the *slòpò* curse power of married women in exogamous and virilocally organised patrilineal descent groups, (b) the "stupidity" motif used to pinpoint wrong and detrimental sociocultural conduct, and (c) the magic power motif that could serve to legitimise the integration of non-descent group males into the group as cultural heroes.

The examples were also able to show how motifs in accounts of oral history combine and enforce each other, not least in order to drive home certain messages that propagate group identity and shared sociocultural values.

It is hoped that the present paper has not only provided some stimulating reading pleasure, but also has been able to throw some more light on people and their languages and cultures in a rather remote area in north-eastern Nigeria along the international border with Cameroon. This area tends to attract comparatively little attention in international research.

Finally, the paper was written to honour Arvi Hurskainen on the occasion of his retirement from office. Hurskainen is a fine anthropologist-cum-linguist, and over many decades he has been a close friend and colleague with whom it has always been a pleasure to interact and cooperate.

Abbreviations used in interlinear translation

| | |
|---------|---|
| ABS | absolute (disjunctive) personal pronoun |
| autoben | autobenefactive (subject affectedness) |
| COLL | collective genitive marker |
| COP | copula suffix |
| DEM | demonstrative marker |
| EXCL | exclusive subcategory of 1 st person |
| EXT | verbal extension suffix |
| FOC | contrastive focus marker |
| GEN | genitive marker |
| ITER | iterative action marker |
| OBJ | object marker (preposition) |
| OPT | optative conjunction |
| PL | plural |
| PREP | preposition |
| POSS | possessive pronoun |
| REP | repeated action marker |
| SG | singular |
| SUB | subordination marker |
| SUBJ | subjunctive verb stem formation |
| vb | verb stem |
| vn, VN | verbal noun stem |

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