Grammar of Loss

A Study in Liminal Linguistics

Anne Storch

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Chapter 3

Levitating backwards

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3 Levitating backwards

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Hill in the dust

A line runs across the page, another crosses it. Yet another line starts straight and then bends. A line meanders and ends nowhere. A frame made of very strict lines frames them all, so that there is a limit of lines, and a clear demarcation of what lies inside and what lies outside the scope. The scope itself is quite rigid.

This is strange stuff, because as one looks around, everything one sees is openness and variety and vastness. There is a lot to make one want to get up and walk and walk, catching the words and sounds and noises with a net as if they were butterflies. Then one could hold them carefully between thumb and forefinger, look at the tops of their wings, where the sunlight creates iridescence, and at the underside of the wings, where there are mimetic images of bark and leaves. Then one should let them fly away so that they don't get damaged or injured. Where they fly to is hard to say. The view is bordered by a misty forest.

On the ground, there is another sound, a more monotonous one that occurs more often than most of the others: *maam*. It is stronger where old baobab trees grow, especially on hilltops, while it is quite faint where the seismic trucks have been and where there is only compacted soil and no plants right now.

Maam maam maam maam maam maam maam.

But then the wind gets stronger and the mist turns out just to be Harmattan dust that hurts the eyes and makes the soles of the feet crack.

Before this particular Harmattan, let us say quite some time before it, people lived not so much on this ground underneath the hazy shadows of the hills, but on top of them. The pre-colonial village was a fortified settlement on the inselberg that, right now, is hardly visible in all the dust, with fields and gardens extending into the open plains. It was still there at the time of this Harmattan, albeit in a state of ruination.

The day before, I had been taken by Muhammad to the home of an elderly man, an old Galadima who was considered to know much about the history of Pindiga and its role in the old Kororofa Empire. He was a tall man with a soft voice who graciously welcomed us. Some children flocked around us once he started talking.

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Figure 3.1 Floor at Barunde's place of birth.

They seemed to be keen to learn about history as well, but then it was all in Hone, and they could not understand most of it, as they were growing up with different languages now. Later, I was asked to come back the next day so that we could see the actual sites of that deep history. On our way back, completing notes, I asked Muhammad what his full name was: "Galadima, and then who?" Muhammad said, "I think he is called Barunde. Barunde Galadima."

Standing on top of the hill between the circular foundations of the ruined houses, Barunde Galadima showed me the remnants of the house he had been born in (Figure 3.1). There were remains of a reddish clay wall, and inside, some remains of a whitish clay floor. Barunde was ninety-five years old at the time. As his soft, high-pitched voice joined the mild wind up there on the hill, he seemed to me to be someone who was left from a different age and time, and perhaps the only person who was still able to make sense of the rubble up there. So I asked about some slightly distant ruin, around which huge baobab trees grew. Was that an old palace? No, it wasn't, it was where the old religion was performed, he said, nothing he wanted to speak about. Then there was a snake, slender and dark, and the children, who had been herding their families' goats nearby and had come to see what we were doing up here, ran away from it. *Bár gìní, dɔ̃́yi tí gìní* 'foot on the ground, snake is on the ground.' Someone said he would send a knowledgeable person to come to my place later and bring snake medicine. That person did indeed come, and I drank water into which the powder he had brought was mixed. After that, I never saw a snake again in Nigeria.

Barunde and I climbed down the hill, me following him, and it looked as if he was floating downwards, as if his walking on that path for almost a century had finally enabled him to levitate. Down on the path leading from the village to the fields, a small boy was crying, as the food bowl containing the lunch for his father had fallen from his head. Barunde comforted him with the hint of a smile. Shortly afterwards, he was gone, had hovered away.

Traces on the ground

Barunde's account of Pindiga's history was later supplemented by other historical accounts, which all spoke to each other and testified to possibilities other than a linear narrative about the past. Both the language maps and the family trees and things like them, with their thin lines demarcating everything, and those histories from Pindiga that resisted straight lines and demarcations, are essentially tales about time, about the past and present of a particular space. But they are also testimonials to the ways in which the cultural modeling of time involves storytelling and narration, by speakers and hearers alike. Tales and stories, however, are ephemeral things which are created abundantly and, with a few exceptions, constantly diffuse into discourses where they finally disappear. According to Albrecht Koschorke, this evokes the impression that culture is largely an arena of an extraordinarily lavish production of short-lived artifacts. But, as Koschorke (2013: 211) argues, "stories in isolation are meant to disappear. In order to thrive and spread, and to become a basis for communication, a story needs to be transposed across contexts." Of course, the stories told by language maps and linguistic family trees do exactly this. They are constantly re-read in ever-differing ways, and are seen as handy evidence for a large variety of assumptions about language history which have been brought forward over the years. However, turning away from the lines achieved by linguists (including by me) in order to listen to and look at what the historically educated and possibly levitating elders of Pindiga had to say about the spaces and locations of their languages, we may enjoy different types of stories. One example of this comes from the historian Musa Tafida, who owned a typewriter and wrote down all the historical knowledge he could put on paper. He wrote in Hausa, for which there was an orthography and sufficient keys on the typewriter. Hone would have needed a few extra characters, which he didn't have, and it would moreover have been a dicey business, with this language that could always unleash its magical powers, just like that. So it was all in Hausa. His story begins with the exodus of the ancestors from Yemen:

> Su Jukunawa sun fito ne daga Nyamal tare da Barebari. Don dama su Jukunawa dan na miji ne, su kuma Barebari 'dan mace ne. Suka zo suka zauna a Sudan daga Nyamal, sun yi kamar shekara (9) tara suna zaune a Sudan, sai suka tashi daga Sudan sai suka zo Gazarguno tare da Barebari watau a cikin kasar Borno, suka yi kamar shekara (3) uku, sai su Jukunawa suka tashi suka zo Tibati wato a gindin Dutsen Bima.

> 'They, the Jukuns came from Yemen, together with the Kanuri people. Because then, the Jukuns are sons of men and the Kanuri are also sons of women. They came from Yemen and settled in Sudan, where they remained for nine years together, until they left Sudan and came together with the Kanuri to Ngazargamo, this is to say to the country of Bornu, where they stayed for three years, until the Jukuns left and came to Tibati, this is the area of Dutsen Bima.'

Narratives like Musa Tafida's are based on the unfailing diversity of the unique case, which is exactly how this story emerges from specific communicative contexts into a wider one (Koschorke 2013: 212). The story told by Musa Tafida is one of a plethora of Kisra legends, stories about origins in the east. Harnischfeger (2015a: 7–8) writes about the historical regional context:

> Ideas about an oriental origin may have first emerged in the Borno Empire, the oldest Islamic polity in the Central Sudan. Its Kanuri rulers claimed to be descendants of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, an Arab prince in Yemen. Sayf was a historic person who ruled c. 570–598 AD, and at the same time he was a mythical hero featuring in Arabic folktales (Lange 2011). According to the Chronicle of Borno, the early kings of the Sayfuwa dynasty were "red like Beduin Arabs", up to Mai Salmama, 1176–1203, who was the first dark-complexioned king (Lange 2011: 7, Palmer 1936: 91–92). In a letter, sent to the Sultan of Egypt in 1391–2, the ruler of Borno expounded his non-African roots: "We are the sons of Sayf b. Dhi Yazan, the father of our tribe, the Arab, the Qurayshite" (Levtzion & Hopkins 2000: 347, 345 […]). Similar stories circulated in northwest Nigeria, in the Hausa kingdoms. Their royal dynasties traced their descent to Bayajidda, a prince from Bagdhad. At the southern periphery of the Hausa states, in Borgu and Nupe, people said that the founder of their kingdoms stemmed from a ruler in Baghdad called Kisra (Meek 1971 [1925]: 71–74). A text written in 1922 by an Islamic scholar in Argungu, Hausaland, asserted that Wukari was among those kingdoms founded by the "tribe of Kisara". These "sons of Kisara" were "unbelievers", who had lived in Egypt but were forced to flee when the Byzantines defeated them "in the sixth year of the Hijra of the Prophet", i.e. in 627 AD. "The Persians and their army fled to the land of Fur, now called Darfur. […] they reached Jebel Kwon and Fasher, and settled in Wadai" before they proceeded to Lake Chad and finally "crossed the river Niger" (Palmer 1967 [1928]: II 61–63). In European accounts of Middle Eastern history, Kisra appears as king Khusraw (Chosroes) II [further: Khosrow II], whose troops occupied Egypt in 616 AD but were expelled by Byzantine forces in 629 AD (Fage 1969: 9). Ancient sources do not tell what happened to these Persian soldiers, but Palmer, Frobenius and others assumed that some of them moved indeed southwards to the upper Nile and from there via Darfur to the Niger.
>
> (Fage 1969: 9, 41)

Many Kisra legends focus on the distant places of origin of the stranger-kings, who, as sacred kings, were conceived as intermediaries between first-comers (or, perhaps, autochthonous groups) and the divine; they possessed spiritual powers that enabled them to maintain a covenant between the people and the spirits. But here, the story is more complex than that, and provides not so much information about the origin of the stranger-kings, but rather about the entire first-comer community of the village.

In Tafida's text, as in many of the more common West African Kisra legends (Stevens 1975, Fuglestad 1978, Stewart 1980), concerned mostly with the stranger-kings themselves, the origin is located in Yemen, a common motif that very often has a deep symbolic meaning. The Hone had been Islamized only recently, from the 1930s onwards, and claiming an origin close to the very center of Islam could therefore enhance the prestige of those who consider themselves as the founders of the village, namely the Jukun of Pindiga. But Yemen did not only represent an origin close to the sacred landscapes of Islam – Mekka, Medina and the pilgrimage routes leading there – it is also repeatedly cited as the place of origin of the ruling house of Borno, closely connected to the historical Kororofa Empire and powerful in the region. The Arabian origin of Borno is derived from Sayf, a pre-Islamic king in Yemen. The attraction of this genealogy lay in the fact that it lent dignity to ruling families, clans or peoples with manifestly "pagan" roots. Their forefather, Sayf, could not have been a Muslim because he had lived before the Prophet. Nevertheless, he was considered a folk hero in the Islamic world because he had driven the Christian Ethiopians out of Yemen and thus paved the way for the autonomy of the Arabs and the spread of Islam. Perhaps, although I do not know, Tafida was not aware of this. But it explains why the Sayf legend found its way into Borno eight hundred years ago, and why Musa Tafida considered this tradition important.

His account of the migration to Sudan is another symbolic element in this story: just a few kilometers away from Pindiga, there is the deserted settlement of Kartu, which in an etymological explanation shared by many in the area was linked to the Sudanese capital of Khartoum. Even though Kartu is considerably older than Khartoum (which dates back only to 1820), it is argued here that the Jukun named the village in memory of the city in the east where they once lived. That the Jukun migrated together with the Kanuri is another important symbolic motif, relating to the history of Kororofa, which had been ruled by a Kanuri dynasty before it became a Jukun polity. Like so many other stories about an eastern origin, this one includes Ngazargamo, which is the old capital of the Kanuri Empire and therefore closely associated with one of the most powerful, enduring and important Muslim polities in Africa. The story continues with the tale of migration into the present Jukun area, listing villages and former settlements that are claimed by them as theirs, but which were always also shared with others. Thus, at the same time, Musa Tafida's manuscript documents a history of relations, inscribed not only into time but also into space. The encounters with other groups, social systems, languages, religions and economies are conceived of here as the central element in the Jukun's own history. And there is no linear and no demarcating way of telling this history. We move forwards and backwards, bilocate a little, make sense out of the world and go on, for pages and pages of pale typewriter font. And it is not

development (of language, technology, whatever) that is the aim of history, but understanding contingency. It is about how we float in this fluidity, and what gives us a mooring, and thus it is ultimately about humility and the realization that the world remains out of control.

The day before our trip up there, Barunde Galadima had told me the story in the way we can both now see it from the top of the hill. As we stand there, in front of his mother's ruined house, we look at how the angel of history piles up rubble in front of our eyes, yet still leaves us with the possibility to make sense of it all, sense made out of relationships we can create out of the moment. These relationships are the groundwork for what Barunde can tell. He is able to do so in Hone, as he does not use a typewriter, but his own high-pitched gentle voice.

Jeepìŋgé,	Jeepìŋgé:	Jánkúlààtàà	nuubáà	ì	Yɛ̀lwá	
people of Pindiga	people of Pindiga	Fulbe	meet them	at	Yelwa	
saa	kánú	yɛ́yì.	Kəjìibə.	Bəbìy	Kártù	
make	war	to us	it eat them	they come	Kartu	
məbìy	Kártù	shíiu	nətìdɔ̀rɛ́.	Bəkə̀ŋbìy	kyák	
and come	Kartu	sitting	not was sweet	they come again	cut	
bɛr	à	kìy	bəshíí	Pìŋgé.		
place	at	here	they sit	Pindiga		

'People of Pindiga, people of Pindiga: the Fulbe met them at Yelwa and waged war on them. They were defeated. They went to Kartu and (when) they came to Kartu staying (there) was uncomfortable. They came again and cut this place here and settled at Pindiga.'

Like the piece from Musa Tafida's narrative, this is part of a collective narrative that is a political myth, which remains meaningful because it can constantly be retold. Storytelling here involves keeping to a particular storyline, which ultimately frames social time, and at the core of this story is not only the intention to associate one's group with prestige and authority, this time by defeating the Fulbe and claiming the land, but also to express a much more significant truth. In Pindiga and all these settlements around, transformation – the central element of the migration stories – is constantly at work, and translocation and change do indeed shape these villages' pasts. The map drawn turns into a real text, a texture woven and used as a rug on which the Harmattan dust can settle. The settlements displayed on it are not only places where there is sovereignty shared by people with different linguistic and social moorings (Appadurai 1996), but they are homes of communities that are unmoored from the stagnant, mapped and named places (Figure 3.2). This storyline binds together utterly diverse experiences, places, people and cultures.

Sacred hills atop sacred plains

Barunde's efforts to tell me a story and show me a site, therefore, directly related to the idea of telling me something crucial about the social history of the

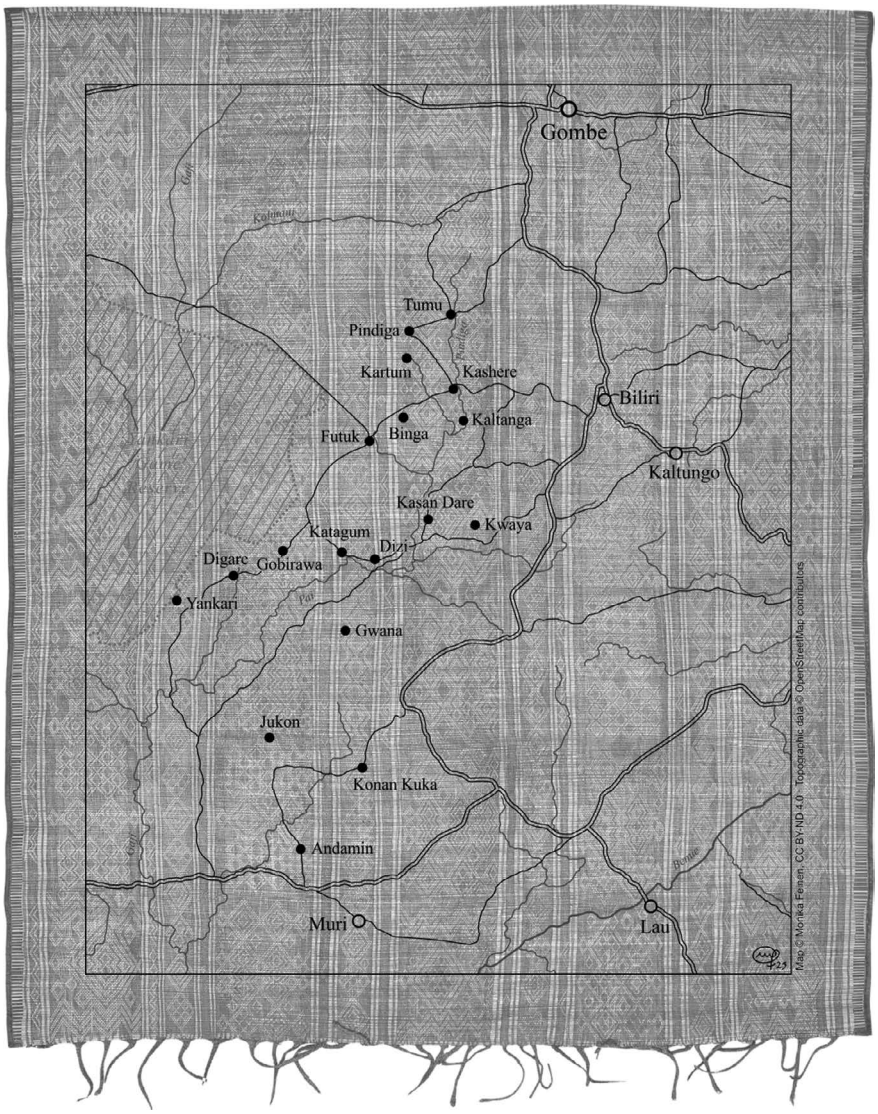

Figure 3.2 Pindiga and surroundings.

region, in which communities emerge on the periphery, at the frontiers and marginalities of hegemonies, and not at their centers. Communities often split, just because a preferred conflict resolution strategy has been migration and retreat (Kopytoff 1987: 17). Chieftaincy tussles and conflicts over power again and again prompted defeated groups to leave their communities and establish new settlements in previously uncultivated areas, such as Pindiga, Kartu or Kashere.

Power in these ever-emerging communities was achieved through the immediate attraction of adherents. The more followers one had, the safer and more powerful

one was. People could be won through marriage into pre-existing local groups, or could be integrated into the society as guests or as refugees – and in many places in the nineteenth century Benue valley as slaves.

With the immigration of new people into the new area, a canonical history (focusing on a common ethnic origin) was established. This concept of history clearly had to do with the construction of a common identity, but it still co-existed with differing histories of kin-groups (focusing on the stories of ancestors who originated from various places). The exchange between communities, both as migrating people and in the form of ritual exchange, created a regional context which incorporated areal features: communities accepted hegemonies by adopting regional patterns and practices (such as shrines and deities) within extremely dynamic borders and over a long period of time. Whenever stabilizing frontier societies became metropoles themselves, new frontier groups continued to emerge and repeat this cycle of loss, hospitality and gain.

Crisis and secession weren't always the consequences of power conflicts, but rather frequently were the results of drought, flash floods, crop failure and other disasters, as Barunde explained later on. Stability was sought in shrines, about which, in contrast, he did not want to explain anything. These shrines were special places, where often only initiated men were permitted to go. And this is a most important detail: in those heterogeneous societies which based their coherence on marriage bonds between clans and ethnic groups, women remained guests in their husbands' families, with hospitality being extended to them as if they were settlers who had lost their home villages – which in a way they were. Meek (1931) assumed that women changed their matrimonial affiliations frequently and thus remained sufficiently distant and foreign to be frequently considered potential threats by men. It might be for that reason that, in various Jukun societies, women, therefore, remained excluded from religious knowledge, spiritual activities and institutions that were associated with power. Their exclusivity from women is, in any case, one reason why important shrines were never located within compounds or even within the realm of the village. Rather, they were constructed in the midst of sacred groves. Often, abandoned settlements later turned into sacred groves, and I now wonder whether this had also happened to some extent on the hill above modern Pindiga. In the past, these sacred places remained centers for pilgrimage even after the villages around them ceased to exist, and their locations were considered so saturated with the power of the sacred that they remained unfit for settling. A song in Hone adorned with a lot of Hausa sounds, offered a few weeks later by a middle-aged woman from modern Mutuk, a village south of Pindiga, recalls this situation:

Kun	líilìlíi	sábarwa	líilìlíi	sábarwa	sába	gìní	sábarwa	sába
he say	lilili	girls	lilili	girls	girls	bottom	girls	girls
dɔ̀ŋ-á	sábarwa							
top-ah	girls							

'He said: Lilili, girls, girls, lilili, girls from the bottom, girls, girls, girls from the top ah!'

The song is about a magician playing his algaita and enchanting all the girls in the marketplace. The enamored girls would be the ones from "up", from the top of the hill, where the old villages had been located in pre-Islamic times, and those from "down", from the modern villages with their shops, mosque and market. But "up" is also where there were pre-Islamic initiations, homes of the spirits, masks and gods.

Both settlements, old and new, up and down, are referred to by the same name, for instance:

Pìŋgé	'village'	= Pindiga
Bɛr à Mùtúu gã	'place of the suspicious hill there	= Mutuk
Kákyɛr rí	'the king's representative's place'	= Kashere
Ágwɔ́nù	'plateau'	= Gwana
Núu Máné	'mouth/coast of salt'	= Numan

At the time, there was little in the names of these villages and towns that still rendered them powerful or spiritually meaningful. In abandoned settlements such as Binga and Kartu, for example, the ancient burial pots, remnants of (often sacred) iron production and many other traces of pre-Islamic culture were largely ignored by the farmers who planted their guinea corn on their grounds.

A descriptive, secular and utilitaristic strategy for naming places is found with geographical landmarks, such as rivers, mountains and so on. Instead of referring to their sheer size and geographical salience, such landmarks are named rather unspectacularly, as in the following examples:

Bɛr Nə́ŋì	'place of sea'	= River Benue
Múrì	'hill'	= Muri Mountains
à yúu Hə̃ne	'inside of the Jukun'	= the south

Naming was different, however, for those places that used to be shrines. The tops of sacred hills and inselbergs were often referred to as the homes of particular ancestral spirits. These were often identified with long-gone sacred kings, who had been turned into gods. Some examples are:

Bɛr Úkà rí	'place of the sacred king'	= Wukari (also hilltop?)
Yàakú rí	'ancestors' place'	= sacred inselberg in Yankari National Park
Bɛr Kî	'place of god/ghost'	= sacred hilltop close to Binga (Yelwa)
Tán Ákì	'house of god'	= hilltop shrine (Kashere area)
Àhwóy Tánú	'big house'	= hilltop towards Mavo
Lɔ̀gì Zàànkàr	'home of Zaankar'	= hilltop shrine near Pindiga
à Wii Pə́	'at Wii Po's	= hilltop shrine (around Pindiga)

These toponyms had different functions than the others: they denoted ownership, made places and rendered them sacred. These places became, through

the shrines erected on and through the powerful names associated with them, constant, invincible and unmovable. They remained lasting vestiges of the Empire, and meaningful and reliable foci of orientation in the vast horizons of the savannah.

There remains little in the West African savannahs that has not been turned into a cultural landscape over the centuries. What the ephemeral settlers created, however, was not a densely populated, urbanized area, but rather a region with small, forever-changing villages, inhabited by frontiersmen and migrants, and a spiritual network that was based on fixed, sacred places. Hence, giving up a settlement due to the farms being exhausted, or leaving a community after having lost out in conflict, never meant migrating into unknown, unpopulated or unsafe lands. Instead, communities relocated from one inselberg neighborhood to another, hopping between spiritually protected spaces, as told by Barunde:

Tòò	Kɔ̀rɔ́rɔ̀fá,	ámáárùù	kəkaanbà	rí.	Bəkə̃ŋsə́m	məshíí
Well	Kororofa	hunger	it send them	actual	they return again	and sit

Wúkàárí	kpát.
Wukaari	all

'As for Kororofa, hunger sent them away. They returned again and they all settled at Wukari.'

They were able to use this sacred network for the organization of spiritual order, as a means of obtaining stability within a world of utter fluidity and constant change. And these sacred focal points on an invisible map are the focal points which are at the base of the storyline of the Kisra legends, which tell us nothing but a story of migration from one holy place to another as the consequence of a deep understanding of the spiritual meanings of sharing relationships, and of resonating with the world. Of course, the place names mentioned in the stories changed with Islamization and colonization, the narrative being adapted to the present (this is why Musa Tafida tells his story in Hausa and Barunde uses the colonial forms of the toponyms for Kororofa and Wukari), but the essential strategy remained the same. There is a good reason to take exactly this as the final layer of the storyline.

Threads in a carpet

To me, the woven carpet is a material expression of contingency. To Africanists of the first half of the twentieth century, when the discipline was being formed, the Kisra legends were interpreted as further proof of the Hamitic hypothesis, which, however, in the Africanist disciplinary environment was not so much based on ethnographic or archaeological data, but on racist constructs in physical anthropology and on questions concerning noun morphology and especially the noun class system of Fulfulde (Storch 1995, Rohrbacher 2002). The compartmentalization of languages by attributing different types of noun classification to different

continents seems irrelevant today – a bygone phase of a colonial discipline. Yet it forms part of a large production of text and discourse that is intricately interwoven with an episteme in African linguistics that remains powerfully relevant: one that is based to a large extent on essentializing languages as types and dislodging them from the actual contexts in which they were spoken, written, played with and so on, and which produced (and continue to produce) a perspective on language that cannot accommodate any theory of language as something that is not a sequestered thing and a discrete entity. This is relevant for the grammar-writing work of the PhD student I once was, but also for my inability to find words that really can express alternative concepts and theories of language. It thus produced not only language ideologies (such as in evolutionary typology), theories (such as on "mixed" languages and language "contact") as well as linguistic practices (such as describing language by filling out word lists and collecting grammar samples during field work sojourns), but also a metalanguage that continues to hinder academically educated linguists (such as the present author) to a great deal in expressing realities of plurilingual ways of living in and with complex communicative repertoires (Busch 2013, Storch 2016, Faraclas & Storch forthcoming, among others).

Plurilingual communicative practices are thus not a consequence of language threat and obsolescence, but a linguistic practice that expresses the constructed identities of first-comers and, at the same time, enables the ever-new formation of heterogeneous communities. While a monolingual population and the construction of a national language were the essential elements of Western colonial language ideologies, dynamic plurilingualism was the essential language ideology of small, diversified societies in many parts of West Africa. It was part of adapting to rapidly changing ecological and political conditions, and it is also a political necessity in today's societies – such as in rapidly growing cities, such as nearby Gombe, Jalingo and Jos.

Language thus presented itself as a complex social phenomenon and was largely conceived of differently than in the West. It was conceptualized here as knowledge that one possessed: borders were not constituted by language or place boundaries, but by the rights of the owners and first-comers. In these multilingual and multiethnic settlements, Western ideas of speaker communities were radically undermined.

Johannes Harnischfeger (2015a: 35) carefully analyzes the construction of community and the spread of dualistic political systems in Jukun-speaking West Africa. He also addresses the connections between language, community and space:

> Jukun speakers did not have an ethnic designation for themselves. Those in Wukari, who lived in the heartland of Kwararafa known as 'Apa', called themselves 'Wapa', while those in Pindiga called themselves 'Hone', and those in Kona 'Jibe'. […] It seems, the pre-colonial 'Jukun' did not see themselves as a tribe or ethnic group. There was no talk about a common ancestor; they rather stressed the idea of a ritual alliance. […] Today's Jukun speakers have a multitude of origins. Many, if not most of their ancestors used to

> speak Chadic, Nilo-Saharan, Adamawa, or other Benue-Congo languages. The process of turning into Jukun took different routes and often remained incomplete.
>
> (Harnischfeger 2015a: 35)

In Pindiga, the traces of this process were probably most present in the communicative repertoires shared by its inhabitants, while the former religious, economic and material differences between those who had settled there over the centuries were now largely leveled out. The languages of groups residing in the villages and towns around Pindiga – Tangale, Waja and Pero to the east, Kulung (Wurkun), Bachama, Loo, Piya and Bashar to the south, Jarawa, Gerawa, Bole and Kupto to the west and north, as well as Naija, Kanuri, Hausa and Fulfulde, which all have trans-regional distributions – were all spoken or at least known within Pindiga itself. A topic frequently addressed by those who identified themselves as Hone in Pindiga was the association of their village with other Hone settlements. In an attempt to come to a better understanding of language proficiency in Hone throughout this area, Muhammad and I traveled to all of these settlements, over the months and often with only vague knowledge of where they actually were. In the end, we compiled a list of them, complete with approximate numbers of speakers: Andamin ca. 500, Binga 0 (uninhabited), Digare ca. 1,000, Dizi ca. 40, Futuk ca. 15, Gobirawa ca. 15, Jukon ca. 3,000, Kaltanga ca. 100, Kartu 0 (uninhabited), Kasan Dare ca. 50, Kashere ca. 500, Katagum ca. 20, Konan Kuka ca. 100, Kwaya ca. 500, Mutuk ca. 50, Pindiga ca. 100, Tumu ca. 30, Yankari 2 and Yelwa 0 (uninhabited). In most villages, speakers were in their fifties and older, and only in the southern settlements, such as Digare, did the children also speak Hone; in such places, Muhammad was often sad and tearful as he shared his experiences of finding it increasingly difficult to construct an identity as Jukun back home in Pindiga. During our various trips, we also collected lists of what the Hone were called by some of their neighbors and how their history was seen: besides *JeepìNgé*, which translates as 'people of the village' and was used as an autonym by the Hone in and around Pindiga, there was *Gwana*, a name for the settlement at Mutuk and its offshoot Digare, used as an ethnonym, especially by the eastern neighbors (Tangale, Pero), as well as by Hausa and Fulbe. Then there was *Jɛmtuk*, a term found in Meek (1931: 32) and sometimes cited by Jukun people who owned or knew this book; it was actually *Jeemùtúk* 'people of Mutuk' and usually referred only to the inhabitants of this place. Third, there was *Gateri*, a name used by the Jibe of Kona for the groups settling north of the Benue and related to them, especially the Hone. The name goes back to the heroic warrior and later king Gàtèrí of Mutuk, who fought against the Fulbe during the Jihad and achieved great fame. And fourth, there was *Kɔ́nà*, used among speakers of Tera, Bole and Tangale to refer to the Hone.

There were also people identifying themselves as Hone living in settlements founded by neighboring groups, but we never managed to meet them all or get even a faint idea about who spoke Hone there. Maybe this was because languages such

as Hone were not only part of a particular place, a specific village or a confined area, but also of the invisible and transcendent. Thus, Hone also continued to be used in concealed ways, for example, as part of a secret ritual language of the Adamawa-speaking Burak, who live northeast of Pindiga (Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer pers. comm., Storch 2011a). In other places, only faint memories remained, such as of women priests who had been sent from Pindiga in order to care for a shrine and provide spiritual guidance. Hone thus continued to exist as part of speakers' repertoires in various forms, as long as it remained useful as part of its speakers' social lives.

These were basically resonances of a strategy for constructing community that is closely related to concepts of origin that emphasize contingency and hospitality. As already mentioned, when conflicts erupted, the weaker party often moved away and founded a new settlement or joined an already existing one. Sometimes, whole villages were abandoned and re-established elsewhere. When founding a new settlement, the migrants brought their ancestors and deities with them and made them the center of local cults. In this way, they instituted their religious and political pre-eminence, forcing settlers who came later and who often spoke different languages to acknowledge the supremacy of the first-comers. Colonial linguists and postcolonial language planners ignored these precolonial ways of constructing and using language, place and power, and suggested new concepts that tied languages to delimited places, filling them with new meanings such as ethnic identity and introducing them to new contexts of learning and knowledge transfer.

In communities that emerged out of this context, being plurilingual is essentially social work. In villages that were always in flux, in terms of both their location and who inhabited them, settlement was always only temporary. The migrants who settled among those who considered themselves first-comers had to count on the authority of a local king or chief and on the cooperation of spirits for the achievement of stability and prosperity. If the cooperation with authorities and the spiritual world failed, subsequent conflicts and crises could result in the eviction of a group and their migration into yet another cultural and linguistic context. This made ever-adapting complex communicative repertoires essential tools for social survival.

As mentioned before, multilingualism was never a uniform communal pattern. Rather, plurilingual repertoires were – and are – individually diverse. This is certainly due to the fact that individual speakers maintain their own particular networks and have individual experiences of the languages they come across and learn. As already described by Koelle (1854) and Crowther (1855), this also concerned the consequences of local jurisdiction and politics. For example, a person who committed a capital offence, such as stealing or adultery, was often simply sold into slavery, and the life stories of some of Koelle's interlocutors tell a lot about how people were not only forced to migrate over large distances but also to adapt repeatedly to new linguistic environments.

The collective, official history that such a society told about itself might be unitary and straightforward. But it was belied by the individual histories of its separate kin groups that showed their ancestors coming from different areas and at different times – as refugees from war or famine, as disgruntled kin group segments, as

losers in the succession struggles of their kin groups or polities, or in reaction to accusations of witchcraft. Some of them may have continued to maintain relations with their relatives, taking part in their funerals and marriage rituals, and there may have been lingering differences in customs, usually those of marriage and burial, which were attributed to different ethnic origins. There may also have been some linguistic differences. The collectivity may have had a dominant "public" language, but some of its kin groups may have privately maintained the knowledge of the language of their parent group, and there may be recognized differences in speech and accent (Kopytoff 1987: 5).

In the Hone region, community making continued to be based on plurilingual practices as social work. Speakers of Hone often played down their ability to speak the language, which had little prestige in Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria. But they nevertheless lived in an environment where even a few words spoken in a Jukun language could serve as emblematic markers of a first-comer identity.

Aya Amina, Muhammad's mother, aged sixty-five at the time, lived on her own as a single woman and had never been to school. However, her father, an elephant hunter, belonged to a prestigious first-comer clan, and this generated considerable social status. Aya Amina only spoke Hone to Muhammad, her only son, who had always been interested in Jukun culture and history, and to the older Hone people around. This was not so much due to convenience, but rather part of the politeness culture in Pindiga. To greet and address Jukun elders in the wrong way, for instance, in Hausa or Fulfulde (before Islamization) or the wrong register of Jukun, had once been a capital offence, just like theft and adultery. In most parts of the northern Hone-speaking region, this had now become irrelevant, but further south and also among the conservative elders of Pindiga, it was still considered important.

In other situations, Aya Amina mostly spoke Hausa, but also Fulfulde, some Kanuri, the Chadic languages Bole, Pero, Tangale and – just to me – English: "Mister Anna ndõwù sànnúnkí yâwwà" 'Mister Anna! I stand up for you (i.e., welcome you to my house)! Hello to you! Alright!' But Aya Amina's repertoire also included different registers of Hone. As a person who had grown up in a family who practiced the pre-Islamic Maamdi religion, she had some knowledge of Nám Hɛnɛ 'language of the priests'. It was based on syllable reversal and shifting the original prefixes into a suffixing position. Even though, as a woman, she would not have had access to sites of rituals and to the shrines and would not have received any broader education in the Maamdi religion, it was exactly this type of language that she used in her songs and storytelling in order to offer some broader education in Hone to me.

Such speech registers were considered deep, beautiful and true language because they were linked to a deep history of relations to the sacred sites on the woven rug-landscape that remain constant places. Aya Amina's son Muhammad Hamma Dada later wrote down a powerful example of the complexity of the interactions between time, space and sound, using his own orthography:

> JE BINGA. Kway hoya bay bh kura Api ku bire bh mpra mh mi Tanbe a Binga ka berayi bh bar Yelwa titami. […] Kun mpra zimko abh dofe ku. Bh do dofe ku, kudo yang berzung kak nonon bh Binga ban. Kuzing sawa dob

> gini kur feng shar ‘gna kun abh kur yukeri, bhdo karkh. Kyar ku kar sim ku fengzi akataa brzik kin shar niri. Akatani kang a sukg ahoyi, kh tiri titam zuzu mh Binga. […]
>
> ‘PEOPLE OF YELWA. Kway was annoyed with the king of Api. He came with his people and built their house at Binga, the place they now call Yelwa. […] He said people who like him should follow him. They followed him, and he found a place, it is not far from Binga, they say. He took his spear and put it down and opened a hole with it, and he said they should enter into it, and they did enter into it. Kway entered later, and he told his hat to close the hole. The hat became a big stone, it is there near Binga. […]’

Muhammad’s story is a wonderful example of how sacred heritage sites were treated in historical discourse: as places filled with spiritual agency, where people disappear into holes and hats are transformed into stones. There is quite a bit of inversion present in this part of the story: in other local migration stories, such as that of the Jalaa (Ulrich Kleinewillinghöfer pers. comm.), groups form through their emergence from a hole, and not by going into one. Moreover, mystical transformation normally happens the other way round, from stone and mud into iron or pot, while here, the hat – the cultural artifact – becomes a rock.

It is also meaningful how Muhammad employed language in this piece. He carefully avoided Hausa or Kanuri words, which were abundant in Barunde’s text, and instead mixed Nám Hɛnɛ (which he had only fragmentally picked up from his mother) with ordinary Hone. The word for ‘hat’, for example, was *àtàgíyá* in Hone. In Nám Hɛnɛ, it turned, via syllable manipulation, into *àgàtá*. The hat turned into a rock was the ultimate proof of magic, still visible, and at the same time inexplicable, and therefore expressed in a word that was not ordinary Hone, but stemmed from a spiritual register of this language. The text contained several more examples of Nám Hɛnɛ, which were typically found in discourse on the old shrines and the pre-Islamic religion, including on witchcraft and sorcery.

In Barunde’s childhood and that of Aya Amina’s parents, Pindiga was, like the other Hone villages, organized as a copy of Wukari, the old spiritual center of power of the Jukun kingdom of Kororofa. The Hone, before their subjugation and Islamization, had paid tribute to the sacred king in Wukari (*ákù ukά*), but were also subject to their own kings (*kùrù*) in their local communities. Their communities were organized into up to seven patrilineal clans, within which titles, specialized professions and secret knowledge were passed on. Meek (1928: 1) names the clans *jan jirkar*, *jan aji*, *jan farbɛ*, *jan abaka*, *jan ashi*, *jan binkani* and *jan asanu* for Pindiga; at the time of Muhammad’s and my work, the clan names *Jeewàléyì* (or *wùr hɛnɛ* ‘kingmakers’), *Jeepìlík* (Pindiga’s main clan), *Jeekwalàté*, *Jeedɔmɔ́n* and *Jeemɔ̀rí* were known in Pindiga. The political terminologies, such as terms for titles, used in Pindiga at the time, illustrate how the pre-Islamic political system had been translated into the current one, which is largely based on the system of domination present in the Borno and Hausa emirates. The list we compiled contains the Hone terms on the left and their Hausa and Kanuri equivalents, as well as my translations of the latter on the right:

Kings

kùrù	Sarki; king
ŋwúnu	Sarki; king of a district or village

Kingmakers

kákyèrè	Galadima; representative of the king in his absence
síkyérì	Ciroma; crown prince
sùnù	Wombei; first counsellor of the king
kín àwúbi	Sarkin fada; first courtier, arbitrator at court

Court and nobility (Báhɛbɛ)

kátánùù	Turaki; royal master of horse; keeper of idols, does not come from the royal family
áwàjí hwow	Galadima; counsellor and teacher of a newly crowned king
ákáŋ núú	Magajin gari; 'he that waits on the mouth', mayor, usually eldest son of the king
hwow átánú	Majidadi; 'the greatest of the house', responsible for affairs of the royal palace
kùŋóó	Tafida; from the royal family
ká ávùnì	Madaki; war leader, king's bodyguard
súmárí	a bard; commander, general
siŋgyám	Yerima; crown prince, advisor to the royal family
ká tán jono	Bauce, role no longer known
ása̋wù	Gado, role no longer known
kùr nɔ́y	Sarkin noma; king of farming
ká kèrì	second Galadima (no longer in Pindiga)
ká jábù	Waziri; minister
ká ákùrù	a judge; handles matrimonial matters
ká ávòbò	Ubandoma; from the royal family, leader of the titleholders
naa yɔ́yì	Baraya; 'to lie in the middle', organizer of public gatherings
kàtáw	role unknown
kun kyéru	role unknown
kádánìí	Makama; chief overseer of slaves; from Kanuri *kanádi* 'patience'
wà àkíí	'wife of death' – female title; a widow advocates for all women's issues and concerns and is the intermediary of women in religion and veneration

Religious titles

kùr kú zàànkàr	chief priest
kùr kú nyím kánì	second chief priest, relative of the *kùr kú zàànkàr*
àvónú	priest, soothsayer; in Nám Hɛnɛ this title is *ávɛŋ*
kànáy	role unknown
mùgò	role unknown
àgwɔ́p sa̋wù	Masu; guardian and master of the spears
kànáábu	role unknown
sindɔ́t	role unknown

The sheer mass of these titles, only a few of which have become opaque in their meanings, does not only illustrate how complex was the system of domination organized around the court of the sacred king, nor how carefully power itself was distributed. Power and wealth were not concentrated in the hands of a single ruler, but used in order to create a balanced system, in which – in spite of the mobility of people, villages, language and the sacred – there also existed a durée profonde (Faraclas 2024). Anne Haour (2013: 48) remarks that this raises "some challenges for archaeology by [suggesting] that certain facets of rulership in West Africa and beyond were probably not marked by the accumulation of material evidence. They are in fact most likely to be manifest archaeologically through aspects of spatial patterning."

Other threads of the woven carpet had been pulled out quite a bit and were harder to conceive, even archaeologically. In Pindiga, the reign of King Hassan (1913 to 1935) marked the beginning of an Islamic society. The deities of the Hone that remained in the shrines after this were later removed by colonial authorities without the consent of the inhabitants of the village and were reportedly taken to the museum in Jos. Words and terms connected to them were less present than those related to the political institutions. Those that we still found were so dislodged from their former sites and moorings that they were a sad sight. And it is sad indeed, if one considers that in Hone the term for 'religion', *dìr daabì*, translates as 'body function, body perfection'. What have the connections between spirituality and language been like? How was body perfection constructed in a world that was organized on the basis of encounters and entanglements? I do not know. The last living follower of the *dìr daabì* at the time was the eighty-two-year-old *Kùr Kú Maam*, who lived in Kashere, performing rain spells on an old burial ground there using sacrifices of chicken and beer, and keeping his wisdom to himself. But there are some traces in older colonial sources such as court files from the time of the inquisition (Green 2025) that provide some access to African voices of the past, as well as early modern accounts of African intellectuals of the Atlantic world (Sweet 2011), which illustrate the intimate connection between West African religions and healing that also continued to resonate in Hone.

Muhammad and some of his friends, who all had grown up in households where knowledge and practices of *dìr daabì* were still present, for example, in the form of small rituals, idiomatic speech or memory making, as stories were told and hills were climbed, said that the new religion they identified with today, Islam, was also dedicated to body perfection. It was about sustaining life, keeping the body alive and in good health and respecting its connectedness with others. The spirits that played such an important role in Maamdi were also present in the Bori spirit possession practices and epistemologies associated with west-central African Islam and especially Hausa society; the ways in which they were organized did not differ all that much, they said.

Spatial patterning involved not only the layout of a village, a palace and shrines, but also, as we have already learned from the accounts of history offered by Musa Tafida, Barunde Galadima and Muhammad Hamma Dada, long-distance connections. And in Bori, and obviously Maamdi as well, they not only expressed large dimensions of space but also of time. In Bori spirit possession, there are also quite

a few modern spirits, such as those of colonial Europeans (Rouch 1953/54, Kramer 1987, Stoller 1995, Krings 1998, 1999), but the majority of the spirits are old and come from all the lands through which the Jukun's ancestors once traveled – the Red Sea, the desert and the Sahel. Some of these roads continue to be much traveled on, by traders, soldiers, rebels and refugees.

Beyond these roads, a dry landscape colored by red sediment stretches all the way to the Aïr Mountains. There are old villages with wells and springs, Timia, for example, and there is Asben, the historical Sultanate of Aïr. It is advisable to always stay on the caravan route in this area and not to deviate from it, because if one gets deeper into the red desert – for example, in the dark or in the fog of the Harmattan, when everything becomes blurred – one may come across the city of Jangare, which is the inversion of all places. If the proof that one has been somewhere is to bring something from there (a loaf of bread, a bag of mangoes, a pair of shoes) or to know a word learned there, a greeting or something like that, then bringing nothing is proof of a visit to Jangare. One doesn't bring anything from Jangare, and one doesn't come back from there either. This is proof that the place exists.

Harold Scheub, in his work on *The Mythmaker as Storyteller*, offers similar information on that place (2000: 39): "Jangare is said to be in the Red Country, between Aghat and Asben. No living person has ever seen this city close, but all travelers know of its whereabouts and, should anyone enter it, he will never be heard of again." Because it is known who lives there, there is a topography of this place. The spirits live in Jangare, and from there they come to take up residence in the bodies of humans. That is why the spirits, in Hausa, are also called *y'an jangare* 'children of Jangare', when they are not referred to as jinn, *iskoki*, or marabouts. Like other villages and towns, Jangare has a king (*sarki*) who is surrounded by a court. He rules over a place consisting of twelve settlements, each of which is headed by a chief, namely the following:

House of the chief of spirits inhabited by the chief 's family, bodyguards, metalworkers and blind spirits	gidan Sarkin Sulemanu
House of the chief's brother	gidan Sarkin Aljan Biddarene
House of the Qur'anic scholars	gidan Malam Alhaji
House of lepers and snakes	gidan Kuturu
House of the Fulani spirits	gidan Sarkin Filani
House of the younger brother of the Fulani chief, incorporating the house of butchers and the house of musicians	gidan Sarkin Aljan Zurkalene
House of water spirits	gidan Sarkin Aljan Shekaratafe
House of the hunters, including Tuareg spirits	gidan Mai Dawa
House of the chief of pagans	gidan Sarkin Arna
House of the chief of Gwari (pagan Nupe)	gidan Sarkin Gwari
House of the North Africans	gidan Barkono
House of magicians and sorcerers	gidan Batoyi

Gida is Hausa for 'house', and *gidan* is the genitive, 'house of'.

Scheub mentions that around two hundred spirits are attributed to the various houses in Jangare. In ethnography, which has long been concerned with possession and ritualization, attention has mostly focused on European spirits, as Jean Rouch's famous film *Les maîtres fous* impressively demonstrates. In the sense of an "ethnography from below" (Kramer 1987: 242 ff.), a diverse pantheon that is spatially organized (according to the origin of the spirits) is represented academically in such a way that those figures come to the fore who seem to be closest to the researching self (the European spirits, in other words). Ethnographers and linguists prove to be selective hosts, one might think, interested in what seems to offer them an ironic view of the hegemonic in their own society – Iskokin Turawa, Y'an Mushe, Kafirai. By attending to the spirit mediums, whose bodies are possessed by Komanda Mugu, Kafaran Gadi, Soja, Mai Yaƙi, Lokotoro, Gwamnan Bataliya, or Kafaran Sakitar, one can show how the Other has long understood what the colonial experience means, namely, a perpetual ruination, horror in the face of a catastrophe that we become to each other, in a spectacle of violence. The showing of images of ghosts, powerful in their subversion, which are distorted images of historical and living figures (the evil commander, the guard corporal, the soldier, the warlord, the doctor, the secretary), also involves a display of one's own attitude – critical, superior, progressive. Jean Rouch (1953/54: 0.11) only lets the ethnographer speak about what Hauka spirit possession probably is: "[…] un rituel qui est une solution particulière du problème de la réadaptation, et qui montre indirectement comment certains africains se représentent notre civilisation occidentale." Spirits that referred to the Other in the Otherwhere, such as the Buzaye (Tuareg serfs), the Iskokin Filani (cattle breeders) and the Iskokin Larabawa (Arabs), were already there long before European Otherness needed to be included in the pantheon. Like the European spirits, they each have their own languages (Krings 1998, 1999), so that what they allow the possessed to say often requires interpretation by a specialized translator. The Other is recognizable in their Otherness, through their clothing, desire for cigarettes or perfume, eating habits, that sort of thing. But they are not inexplicable. They are sayable and translatable.

In Pindiga, it was mostly remembered that there was a pre-Islamic god *Ákídɔ̃ŋ* 'god of the sky', associated with heaven and the supernatural forces, and the deity *Maam* or *Maamdì*, who was associated with earth and earthly creation and mediated between humans and *ákídɔ̃ŋ*. In the *Maamdi dìr daabì* of the Hone, seven deities (*gyɔ́nù*) were worshipped in addition to the sky god, who all had their houses in the realm of the sacred, near a large river: *Maam bə́ wàaa* 'Maam and his wife', *Kyɛ́rɛ́ bə́ wàaa* 'Kyɛrɛ and his wife', and *Wii Pɔ̃́ bə́ wàaa* 'Wii Pɔ̃́ and his wife', as well as the gods taboo to women, referred to as *yààkú* 'ancestor', *ákú nɔ̀k* 'god of the house', *nyím kánì* 'pregnant with war' and *zàànkàr* 'mother of the great king', the last two of whom were actually legendary kings or heroes of the Hone. The highest religious authority was the *Kùr Kú Zàànkàr* 'king of the god Zaankar', who, as the chief priest, presided over all ceremonies (*wúp wúbu*). His material attributes are *wúúlu*, a dark blue string around the neck, and then *pálám* 'axe', *sáwu* 'spear', *kúnì* 'knife', *tɔ́ɔ́rɔ̀* 'quiver', *tawu* 'bow' and *hwə̃́wù* 'leather clothing'.

During rituals and especially in times of crisis, when colonial power-grabbing and the conquest by new Islamic rulers overwhelmed the village, and the old orders and norms collapsed, the gods came and mounted men and women. What continues to strike me is that all those who had detailed knowledge of these incidents said that the men then spoke in the languages of the gods, while the women fell completely silent, their bodies shaking and bent from the spiritual load.

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