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Mapping the Intersections: History, Religion, Culture, Governance, and Economics in Taraba North Senatorial Zone, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper offers a comprehensive analysis of the religious, socio-cultural, political, and economic intricacies within the Taraba North Senatorial Zone in Nigeria, focusing on its diverse ethnic groups. The study utilizes a qualitative analysis approach, drawing insights from scholarly literature and interviews with community members. By identifying common themes across different ethnic groups, the paper aims to illuminate the factors shaping social cohesion, governance dynamics, and economic development in the zone. The findings highlight the rich tapestry of religious beliefs, cultural practices, and economic activities among the ethnic groups, showcasing the coexistence of Islam, Christianity, and indigenous spiritual practices. Governance structures range from theocratic models to decentralized councils of elders, reflecting the autonomy of each ethnic community. Economically, the zone exhibits a mix of traditional agriculture, artisanal crafts, and contemporary pursuits, illustrating the adaptive nature of these communities. The paper emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone. It finally advocates for inclusive development strategies that respect cultural diversity and empower local communities.

Keywords: *History; Religion; Culture; Governance and Economics in Taraba North.*

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Introduction

Taraba State, characterized by a mosaic of ethnicities, diverse historical roots, and varying religious practices, presents a fascinating nature of land, people, and history. Originally rooted in African Traditional Religion, the State experienced the gradual influence of Islam during the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries, followed by the introduction of Christianity in the early Twentieth century. This religious evolution has shaped the multi-religious identity seen in Taraba State today, with almost every family embracing one of the three major religions[1].

Moreover, with over eighty indigenous ethnic groups and numerous languages spoken, Taraba State's social fabric is intricately woven with interconnections and assimilations among smaller groups. This exploration focuses on the Northern Senatorial Zone, comprising Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Lau, Yorro, and Zing, where diverse ethnic groups coexist, each practicing Islam, Christianity, or Traditional religion[2].

However, this captivating blend of cultures and religions has not been without challenges. The calmness that once characterized the state was disrupted shortly after its creation, giving rise to issues such as tribal, religious, political, and sectional tensions. Of particular concern are ethno-religious conflicts, which have become a pressing issue not only for Taraba State but also for Nigeria as a whole[3]. In the subsequent exploration, we present the intricacies of the Northern Senatorial Zone, aiming to shed light on the delicate balance between cultural diversity, religious coexistence, and the challenges faced by this dynamic region.

Method

The study relies on both primary and secondary data, primarily obtained through structured interviews, participatory observation, and the analysis of documentary sources. The approach encompasses extensive fieldwork conducted with the assistance of research personnel.

Result and Discussion

The The Development of Taraba State: From Establishment to Growth

Taraba State came into existence on August 27, 1991, following its separation from the former Gongola State during General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's administration. Named after the Taraba River, which flows through its southern region, and with Jalingo serving as its capital, the state initially consisted of twelve Local Government Areas. Over the period from September

1991 to 2019, the number of Local Government Areas increased to sixteen, with the addition of two Special Development Areas—Yangtu, established in 2008, and Ngada, created in 2016[4]. The evolution of Taraba State from its establishment in 1991 to its growth and expansion over the years reflects a significant journey of administrative and territorial development. The addition of new Local Government Areas and Special Development Areas underscores the state's efforts towards decentralization and equitable distribution of resources.

Located in the northeastern part of Nigeria, Taraba State extends between latitude 60 30´ and 90 36´ north of the equator and longitude 90 10´ and 110 50´ east of the Greenwich meridian. It shares borders with Bauchi, Gombe, Adamawa, and Plateau states, as well as internationally with Cameroon to the south and southeast. Encompassing a land area of 59,400 km2[5]. The state had a population of 2,300,736 people in 2006.

Ethnic Diversity and Cultural Dynamics in Taraba North Senatorial Zone

The Taraba North Senatorial Zone, located within Taraba State, exhibits a rich tapestry of ethnic diversity, comprising various groups such as Bambuka, Bandawa, Chamba, Chomo, DJenjo, Gwomu, Jukun-Kona, Kam, Kiyu, and Fulbe, among others[6]. Notably, the presence of Hausa and Kanuri-speaking communities contributes to the cultural mosaic, with the widespread use of the Hausa language throughout the area. Understanding the migration patterns and historical timelines of the diverse communities within the Middle Benue Region, formerly part of the Middle Benue Region before the establishment of Taraba State, presents significant challenges[7]. These challenges arise from the complexities of evolving religious practices, artistic expressions, traditional customs, and assertions of origins over centuries. Additionally, many of these communities historically operated under decentralized political systems characterized by small territorial units.

The Taraba North Senatorial Zone encompasses the geographical regions of Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, Karim Lamido, Yorro, and Zing Local Government Areas, totaling sixty-two wards[8]. Islam and Christianity are the predominant religions in the zone, with some adherents practicing the traditional religion[9]. The projected population of Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone for 2021 was 1,152,345[10].

Table 1: 2013-2018 Projected Population Figures of Taraba North Senatorial Zone, Taraba State

/No	L.G. A.	2006	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2021
	Ardo-Kola	89,784	109,824	113,395	117,083	123,646	127,664	131,816	137,673
	Jalingo	140,318	175,548	181,010	182,150	193,236	199,519	206,007	220,062
	Karim-Lamido	193,924	242,613	250,161	258,648	267,058	275,742	284,709	304,133
	Lau	95,190	119,089	122,795	126,960	131,089	135,351	139,753	149,285
	Yorro	89,865	112,427	115,925	119,858	123,756	127,780	131,934	140,936
	Zing	127,685	159,743	164,713	170,301	175,839	181,556	187,460	200,256
	Total	736,766	919,244	947,999	975,000	1,014,624	1,047,612	1,081,679	1,152,345

Source: Alh. Karimu Fwashan Yakubuict, Head of Technical Department, National Population Commission, Taraba State: 2014-2018 & 2021 Projected Population Figures

This zone reflects remarkable ethnic diversity, with various groups coexisting harmoniously, including Hausa, Fulani, Mumuye, Jukun-kona, Wurkun, Jenjo, Nyandang, Munga, among others. Islam and Christianity are the predominant religions in the zone, although there are also practitioners of traditional religions. This blend of cultures, religions, and traditions underscores the dynamic social fabric and cultural vibrancy of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone.

Historical Narratives of the Muri Emirate

Founded by the Fulbe in the 19th Century, the Muri Emirate traces its origins to the small Jukun community of Je-Muryan or Je-Muri in western Karim Lamido, which served as its initial capital. Over time, its administrative structure evolved from being a province in 1926 to later becoming a division in 1976. The territorial boundaries of Muri stretch from the river at Djen to Ibi in the west, bordered by the Wurkun Mountains to the north, Mumuye highlands to the northeast, and the Chamba of Dakka to the east. To the south, Muri shares borders with Bauchi, Gombe, and Adamawa, with the eastern border encompassing Pupule, including the lowlands in present-day Yorro Local Government. To the west, Muri borders Wukari, with areas like Bantaje, Jibi, and Ibi falling under emirate authority. Additionally, the emirate's influence extends to Bakundi in the mid-Taraba valley in the south, reaching Baruwa (occupied by the Jibu) and Kurmi (home of the Tigon and Ndoro)[11].

During its peak expansion roughly between 1904 and 1915 CE, the Muri Emirate underwent a significant transformation into a province with three administrative divisions:

1. The Lau division, later renamed Muri Emirate in 1915, comprised Bakundi, Gassol, Jalingo, Kona, Lau, Muri, Mutum Biu, and Wurkun.
2. The Ibi Division included Donga, Ibi, Takum, and Wukari.
3. The Tshendam Division consisted of Ankwe, Kassan Chikki, and Wase[12].

In the contemporary context, Jalingo, Kwona, Muri, and Wurkum (Karim-Lamido) are situated in the Northern Senatorial Zone; Bakundi, Gassol, and Mutum-Biyu in the Central Senatorial Zone; while Donga, Ibi, Takum, and Wukari lie in the Southern Senatorial Zone of Taraba State. Lau and Ibi Divisions constitute most parts of Taraba State, while Tshendam Division presently lies between Nasarawa and Plateau States.

Political Landscape of Northern Senatorial Zone of Taraba

Taraba State is organized politically into three Senatorial Zones: Northern, Central, and Southern. The Northern Zone consists of six Local Government Areas (Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, Lau, Karim-Lamido, Yorro, and Zing), while the Central Zone encompasses five Local Government Areas (Bali, Gashaka, Gassol, Kurmi, and Sardauna). Similarly, the Southern Zone comprises five Local Government Areas (Donga, Ibbi, Takum, Wukari, and Ussa). Each zone functions as a Senatorial District, electing one Senator and two Members of the House of Representatives. Furthermore, the State Legislature comprises 24 members of the State House of Assembly[13]. This paper specifically delves into the political dynamics of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone, which includes Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, Lau, Karim-Lamido, Yorro, and Zing Local Government Areas.

Origins and Migrations of Ethnic Groups in Taraba North Senatorial Zone

The historical movement of human groups has been characterized by ongoing migrations driven by various factors, resulting in both temporary and permanent resettlements. The motivations behind these migrations are diverse, encompassing recurring, spasmodic, piecemeal, seasonal, periodic, or linear factors. For example, the Fulbe engage in migrations to secure pasture or grazing land for their cattle, involving seasonal, periodic, cyclical, and piecemeal processes. Consequently, migration can be interpreted as the movement of people seeking a more favorable, conducive, or friendly environment. Other groups like the Yandang, Mumuye, and Chamba trace their origins to the Mandara Highlands[14].

In Taraba State, numerous ethnic groups exhibit intricate interconnections, marked by close ties and assimilation, especially among smaller groups. The discussion centers on specific ethnic groups, including Bandawa, Fulbe, Hausa, Jenjo, Kona, Mumuye, Nyandang, and Wurkun.

The Bandawa

The term "Bandawa" encompasses both a settlement and an ethnic group referred to as Sho, a designation bestowed upon them by the Fulbe in Muri Emirate, derived from the Fulbe term "Banduwam," indicating familial ties. The Bandawa's historical roots intertwine with the Jukun, as they were among the early communities to encounter Fulani Jihadists in 1812. Linguistically, their language shares similarities with Lau, Kunini, Minda, and Jessi languages, predominantly found on the south bank of the Benue River[15].

Despite linguistic connections with the Jukun, the Bandawa people hold beliefs in a common origin, reflected in shared terminology like "ku" for chief, reminiscent of the Jukun's "Aku Uka." Similarities extend to spiritual practices, including reverence for the sky deity "Lu Lakwa" and the earth deity "Nyimwa." The Bandawa, along with riverine tribes like the Jenjo, trace their origins to Kiri in the former Numan Division and have historical ties to raids on hill tribes alongside the Fulani[16].

Another narrative traces the Bandawa's origins back to the late 17th century in the Kwararafa Kingdom. Following internal conflicts, led by "Sho," they migrated from Kwararafa to the confluence of rivers Taraba and Benue. From there, they journeyed eastward, establishing a settlement near a prominent baobab tree known as Nwulavi or Bandawa-Kuka, west of present-day Lau District[17]. The Bandawa's historical trajectory is intertwined with complex migration patterns, cultural exchanges, and spiritual beliefs. Their origins reflect a blend of historical events, linguistic affiliations, and mythological narratives, contributing to the diverse cultural landscape of Taraba State.

The Chamba

The Chamba people migrated to the study area in the late 18th century from the northeast, specifically around the headwaters of the Benue and Faro rivers, prompted by famine and conflicts with the Bata[18]. Linguistically, they are divided into two groups: Chamba Leko and Chamba of Daka. Chamba Leko includes individuals from Kungana, former Adamawa Province, and Donga, Suntai, Takum, and Rafin Kada of former Benue Province, while Chamba Daka encompasses the former Muri Division[19].

Sa'ad notes that Chamba migration into the region took place in the early 19th century due to famine and succession crises in the Alantika Mountain. Led

by Damshi, one group established the state of Binyeri in Mumuye territory, while another under Binyawa moved westward, founding the Chamba chieftaincy of Dakka. Additional Chamba groups established chieftaincies in Donga (1851) and Sunatai (1868)[20].

Elijah and Vincent report that the group led by Damashi played a key role in establishing the Chieftaincies of Binyeri. As they conquered the Mumuye in Binyeri, a splinter group migrated to Dinding in present Zing Local Government Area of Taraba State. Hamman also supports this account, stating that the Chamba, led by Damashi and Binyawa, dispersed due to famine and conflicts with the Bata, eventually settling among the Mumuye, with Binyeri as their base[21].

The history of the Chamba people is marked by migrations driven by factors such as famine and conflicts, leading to the formation of distinct chieftaincies and settlements in the region.

The Fulbe

The Fulbe, believed to have entered Hausaland in the early 14th century, expanded their presence west of Borno by the 16th century. Concurrently, some Fulbe migrated to the Adamawa and the Middle Benue Region for scholarly pursuits and better grazing lands. The death of Mai Idris Alooma in the 17th century prompted additional Fulbe migrations into the Middle Benue Region[22].

The initial Fulbe settlement in Muri is thought to have originated from Mali, reaching Borno and then moving to Kiri on the River Gongola before settling in Muri in 1817. Fulbe expansion into Adamawa, Muri, and the lower basin of the Gongola River occurred in the late 17th century, integrating with Jukun communities[23]. According to Edward Kiledu, Fulani presence in Muri dates back to around 1756, fostering amicable relations with the Jenjo at Kiri[24]. Abubakar notes that the Fulbe in the Muri area were exposed to Islam during their settlement in the Chad Basin before migrating to Kiri-Gongola Valley in the 17th and 18th centuries[25]. Sa'ad argues that Fulbe entered the region from the lower Gongola valley in the early 19th century due to internal conflicts, settling on the banks of Lake Jesumu with the support of the Jenjo. The Fulbe later crossed the Benue and established themselves at Gowe, forming cordial relations with the Kunini and subsequently dispersing to other parts of the Middle Benue region[26].

Ahmad emphasizes the existence of an unwritten Fulbe Code of Conduct called Pulaku, encompassing principles such as patience and fortitude (Munyal), modesty and reserve (semtede), and care and thoughtfulness (hakkilo).

Additional principles mentioned include kindness ('endam), bravery (Ngorgu), and dignity/self-respect (Ned'daaku)[27].

The Fulbe's historical journey is marked by migrations, cultural integration, and the adoption of a distinct Code of Conduct, highlighting their resilience and adaptability over the centuries.

The Hausa

The Hausa-speaking population emerged as early migrants to the Middle Benue Region, arriving peacefully from Hausaland in the 15th century, which fostered early commercial activities between the regions[28]. Hausa traders were instrumental in exploring the Wurkun hills for commerce, thereby establishing relationships that facilitated the influx of the Fulbe. Alongside the Fulbe, Hausa and Kakanda traders played a pivotal role in introducing Islam to Jen in the late 18th century[29].

In Karim, Taraba State, Hausa inhabitants trace their origins to figures like Malam Sale Mato from Kano, who arrived around 1918. Accepted by the Kiyu ethnic group, Malam Sale Mato, with Muhammad Tukur's blessing, was integrated into the palace of the District Head. Other notable Hausa groups, such as the Katsinawa, under the leadership of Malam Jibir Dankoli, also arrived in Karim, maintaining amicable relations with the Kiyu host community[30].

The long-standing presence of Hausa-speaking people in Yorro and Zing Local Government Areas is confirmed, with notable families and individuals contributing significantly to the community. This influence is reflected in the traditional title of Sarkin Hausa Yakoko in Zing Local Government Area[31].

Presently, Hausa is widely spoken across all six Local Government Areas of the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone, Taraba State, underscoring its enduring cultural and linguistic significance in the region.

The Jenjo

The Jenjo predominantly inhabit Karim Lamido, Jalingo, Mutum-Biyu, Garba-Chede, and Ibi and trace their roots to the Bata ethnic group. Their migration into the Middle the Jenjo community primarily resides in Karim Lamido, Jalingo, Mutum-Biyu, Garba-Chede, and Ibi and traces its ancestry to the Bata ethnic group. Their migration into the Middle Benue Region, particularly the study area, in the 18th century, possibly from Lamorde or Imbru in the Numan area of Adamawa State, was prompted by conflicts with the Bata rulers[32]. Historical records suggest that the Jenjo may have initially settled in Numan but were later displaced by the Bachama during the Bata migration from the upper Benue. The late 18th-century migration of the Jenjo down the Benue to

their current location in the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone was driven by the ambitious expansion of the Bata[33].

In their present environment, the Jenjo coexist with a diverse linguistic cluster comprising numerous groups, each with distinct dialects representing languages from various African linguistic families. While the Jenjo belong to the Adamawa sub-family, neighboring groups like the Bachama and Bandawa speak languages from different linguistic families such as Chadic Central and Benue Congo, respectively[34]. The Jenjo community played a significant role in forming an alliance with the Jihadists, which was instrumental in establishing the Muri Emirate, headquartered in Jalingo, Taraba State[35]. This historical alliance with the Jihadists underscores the Jenjo's pivotal role in shaping the region's political landscape, reflecting their deep-rooted historical connections with the Kiri community.

The Kona

The Kona people primarily inhabit an exclusive village within the Jalingo Local Government Area, surrounded by imposing mountains to the north, east, and west, and a fertile valley with perennial streams to the south. Originally established as a District since the British conquest of Muri in 1901, Kona currently functions as an administrative District in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The term "Kona" has diverse potential origins, possibly from the Kanuri Language, Jibu word "Kauna" meaning "excuse," or Fulbe word "konobe" signifying "Warriors[36].”

Historically, the formation of centralized states among the Jukun-speaking people, including Kona, dates back to the influx of Jukun immigrants around 1500 into the Middle Benue Region. The Kona settlement on the Kona Hills, forming the western boundary of the Zinna-Mumuye, played a crucial role in influencing neighboring ethnic groups like Mumuye, Nyandang, Kunini, and Apawa since the 15th century[37].

Sa’ad highlights the well-established large state system of the Kona Jukun in the Middle Benue region before the 19th century, strengthened by economic resources like the Mumuye iron industry, salt accessibility at Bomanda, and a significant fishing industry on the Benue. Although uncertainties surround the exact date and path of Jukun migration into present-day Taraba State, the Kona broke away during these migrations, settling at Kur in the northern part of Taraba State[38].

Despite uncertainties surrounding their migration, the Kona exercised religio-political control, influencing neighboring ethnic groups and fostering loyalty over time. They practiced various traditional belief systems,

incorporating rites, cults, and practices within their communities[39]. The historical legacy of the Kona reflects their significant impact on the cultural and political landscape of the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone.

The Mumuye

The Mumuye, characterized as an ethnic conglomerate with diverse groups and local titles, inhabit the North-East Highlands, forming the Northern Zone of Taraba State. Concentrated in Zing, Yorro, Jalingo, and Ardo-Kola Local Government Areas, the Mumuye play a significant role in the cultural fabric of the region[40].

Originally known as 'Shoyazin' and later termed 'Mumuye' by the Fulbe[41], Saad suggests that the Pugun group's migration from Kam to the Mumuye massif might have occurred in the early fifteenth century. Other Mumuye groups, including Kutsere, Zumfa, Manna, Kwoji, Mika, and Zavon, confined their movements within traditional Mumuye Land, positioning the Mumuye as the earliest inhabitants of the southern parts of Muri[42].

Despite slight dialectical variations, the Mumuye communicate generally in the same language and are divided into seven Mega clans, each with its unique geographical presence. Coexisting with neighboring groups such as Yandang, Kunini, Fulbe, Kona, and Wurkun, the Mumuye share space in Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, Yorro, and Zing Local Government Areas of Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone. Furthermore, Mumuye communities extend to Karim-Lamido Local Government Area, including Munga, Booka, Bambuka, and Dadiya[43].

The Mumuye, with their rich heritage and extensive residence, contribute significantly to the cultural diversity and social dynamics of the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone.

The Wurkun

The Wurkun community is believed to have migrated from Gwandon in the northeast to Balassa and Kakalla around 1750. Initially settling on Balasa hill, they later dispersed to the north and west, influencing the migration of some Jukun from Kwona to the north bank of the Benue, establishing a settlement at Kulum hill to the southeast near Balassa[44].

Historically, before the 19th century, the Wurkun lived in independent villages governed by distinct clans, each led by its headman and religious cult. Linguistically connected to the Mbula in Adamawa State, the Dass in Bauchi, and groups in Southern Plateau, Nasarawa, and Kaduna States, the Wurkun suggest a migration from the Chad Basin into the northern parts of the Middle Benue region in the 15th century[45].

Joseph Greenberg classified the various small linguistic groups within the Wurkun under the Central Branch of the Niger-Congo linguistic family. The term "Wurkun," believed to be of Jukun origin, translates to 'people of the hills,' reflecting the nature of their territory and includes clans like Ba-Kulu and the Walo[46]. Divided into two groups by Kiledu, the Wurkuns occupy the foothills of the Bauchi Plateau, with the northern sector centered on Piliya (Pero) and the southern sector on Bambur and Kirim[47].

Presently, the Wurkun predominantly reside in Balasa, Bambur, Jikolo, Kirim, Kiwonshi, Darfuwai, Bamingun, Pitiko, Bashama, Wiam, and Koghoro in Karim-Lamido Local Government Area. A substantial Wurkun population is also found in Ardo-Kola, Jalingo, and Lau Local Government Areas. The Wurkun's historical journey and diverse cultural roots contribute to the rich tapestry of the Middle Benue region.

The Yandang

The Yandang population, originally known as Nwin-Hukk and later adopting the name Yandang, emerged as neighbors to the Mumuye, separated by a river near the Yorro hills. Over time, they came to consider Yorro as their original home, signifying a shift in their identity[48]. he term "Nwin-Khuk," meaning "fellow tribe person," has historical roots dating back to 1300 A.D., occupying the hill country between Jalingo and the Districts of Mayo-Belwa and Mayo-Faran[49].

The Yandang's origin and migration theories propose an eastern affiliation, suggesting a journey from the east (Egypt) through the Adamawa Mandara Highlands, settling at Wayoro before moving to Yakoko Yonko. However, precise information on the period, specific eastward origins, or documentary evidence supporting this remains elusive[50]. While some theories suggest an Egyptian origin, archaeological evidence contradicts the notion, indicating that the original Gorobi, an abandoned settlement site, is situated in modern Gorobi in Mayo-Belwa Local Government Area of Adamawa State. This historical context challenges the notion of a distant Egyptian migration[51].

Geographically, the Yandang people inhabit the fertile grasslands of Lau, spanning across Yandang Lau, Yorro, Zing, Karim Lamido, Ardo Kola, Bali, and Gassol Local Government Areas in Taraba State. Despite their widespread presence, the Yandang society did not evolve with a centralized political entity[52]. The intricate narrative of the Yandang's origin and geographical dispersion contributes to the cultural mosaic of the Middle Benue region.

Additional Groups in Taraba's Northern Senatorial Zone

The primary focus of this research revolves around the major ethnic groups outlined above, as many of the other ethnic entities in the region lack distinct and separate identities. However, it's essential to recognize the intricate interconnections among these groups, especially the smaller ones. For instance, Wurbo, Bandawa, Kunini, Wunlau, Chomo, Jiru, Alan, Birkani, and Je-Muryan (Muri) exhibit close ties, inhabiting the riverain area with shared cultural and social integration. Referred to collectively as "Wursan" by the Jukun, these groups are situated in the northern part of Taraba State, spanning various Local Government Areas within the Zone[53].

Moreover, the Kiyu and Shumo families in Karim Lamido Local Government Area are integral components of the Jukunoid Family[54]. Conversely, the Wurkun comprises multiple small ethnic groups like Bakulu, Walo, Lelo, Bambuka, and Gwomu, originating from the Mumuye ethnic group. The Bandawa, Karim, and Munaga also have Jen extraction. These ethnic clusters within the Wurkun category are predominantly concentrated in Karim Lamido Local Government area[55].

These examples offer glimpses into the rich tapestry of ethnic diversity within Taraba North Senatorial Zone, Taraba State, extending beyond the principal ethnic groups discussed earlier. Understanding the traditions of origin among these minor ethnic groups contributes significantly to our comprehension of the region's cultural landscape.

Exploring Origin Traditions: Insights into the Ethnic Tapestry

Sa’ad highlights the fascinating blend of major African linguistic families within a relatively small area, suggesting a history marked by peaceful migrations and settlements among diverse communities. This indicates that historical relations among these groups were not characterized by conflict or hostility. Consequently, the traditions recounting their origins and migrations underscore themes of migration, shared heritage, and harmonious cohabitation among the ethnic groups in the locality, offering valuable insights into the intricate tapestry of their historical interactions[56].

Insight from Ali suggests several key implications drawn from the traditions of origin among Taraba State's diverse ethnic groups. Firstly, it reflects the predominant pattern of immigration shaping the demographic landscape. Secondly, it indicates that these ethnic groups have shared historical ties, having been neighbors at various points in time, whether in the Lake Chad Basin or the Upper Benue Region around River Gongola. Thirdly, it implies a long-standing

history of peaceful coexistence among these groups, with mutual recognition and acceptance until recent times[57].

Exploring the origin traditions of the diverse ethnic groups in Taraba State reveals a complex tapestry of migration, shared history, and peaceful coexistence. These narratives provide profound insights into the intricate dynamics that have shaped the cultural landscape of the area over centuries. Understanding and appreciating these traditions not only enriches our comprehension of the past but also sheds light on pathways for fostering harmony and unity among diverse communities in the present and future.

Religious Dynamics in Taraba State

Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the predominant religious beliefs among the ethnic groups in Taraba's Northern Senatorial Zone revolved around various mediators and entities serving as links between humans and the natural world. These groups cultivated diverse cults and deities, with a focus on sky and earth gods, as well as practices related to ancestor veneration. Notably, ancestor worship held significant sway among the Mumuye and other communities, where former kings often held central roles as deitie[58].

Presently, Taraba State's religious landscape exhibits a notable presence of Muslims and Christians, alongside pockets of adherents to Traditional Religion[59]. Despite some individuals retaining aspects of traditional practices and incorporating them into church activities, the introduction of Islam and Christianity has prompted most communities to forsake traditional beliefs in favor of these global religions[60].

The religious dynamics in Taraba State have undergone significant transformation from traditional beliefs to the widespread influence of Islam and Christianity, with only remnants of the older practices persisting in certain pockets of society.

The indigenous Religious Practices of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone in Taraba State.

In the Taraba North Senatorial Zone of Taraba State, prior to the influence of Islam and Christianity, the inhabitants followed a belief system deeply connected to the natural order of existence. For instance, the Mumuye ethnic group practiced their traditional religion not only to promote unity but also to attain success and maintain stability[61]. Among them, Vaka held a central position as their deity, and their rituals, which included seasonal sacrifices, exhibited similarities to other African traditional religious practices prevalent in the area[62].

Significantly, chief priests played pivotal roles as intermediaries in various cults, overseeing rituals during different periods of the year such as planting, harvesting, and hunting[63]. Notably, the Mumuye's yam festival was a notable ceremony marked by offerings and festivities, while the Jenjo people engaged in practices like Mihu and the Kweh cult's announcement of the national hunting day during the rainy season, holding rituals in a designated bush to seek guidance from ancestral spirits[64].

Observations by Gurama highlighted similarities in worship practices across different communities, with distinct variations in the conduct, leadership, and locations of worship[65]. Additionally, the traditional religious practices of the Bandawa ethnic group involved the veneration of two principal deities: Lu Lakwa, a sky deity linked to the sun, and Nyimwa or Nyimo, an earth-deity considered the creator of humanity and all living beings[66].

In the Muri area of the Fulbe nomads in Taraba North Senatorial Zone, exposure to Islam was limited before the Jihad, with some groups, like the Kitije, primarily engaging in "pagan cow worship" until the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate. Ancestral worship persisted among the Kiti'en people of the Gongola valley until the early 20th century[67]. he integration of Islamic culture into the cultural life of the Fulbe was emphasized by Bose through the code of conduct known as Pulaaku, aligning with Islamic teachings[68].

Among the Hausa ethnic group, the practice of Bori cults led by a priestly class called bokaye involved overseeing rituals associated with spirits possessing mystical powers[69]. Ancestor worship was common among the Kona people, with the Kuru deity, Kurumam, revered as the creator-God and a sacred ruler of divine lineage[70].

In Mumuye culture, the central belief revolved around a living God, Kpanti Laa, seen as the creator, sustainer, and owner of the universe. Intermediaries between the creator and creation were evident in the practices of Vaka and Vaa mang. Ancestor worship using skulls was performed, considered essential for the ancestors as agents of Kpanti Laa[71]. The chief priest, known as Panti va, Panti Vaka, or Panti Vabon, holds a significant position in the Mumuye village, serving as the guardian of the primary cult associated with corn or yam spirits. Chiefs overseeing rain (Panti Mi) and thunderstorms (Panti Giriri) also play crucial roles[72]. Musa and Nyavo support the perspectives of Hamman and Marubitoba et al. regarding the worship of idols, including Vaka (Dodo), among the followers of traditional religion among the Mumuye[73].

Among the Wurkun ethnic group, belief in God Almighty was expressed through smaller gods called Basali[74]. The Kulung ethnic group revered gods such as Zukki, Boughe, and Yauba (Creator of the Universe), with similar

practices observed in the Piya group[75]. he traditional religious practice of the Wurkun involved belief in the Supreme God Yauba and his ancestors or lesser gods (Khindimma in Piya and Basali in Kulung). Other gods included Akkuh, Jughe, and Khundul, while the goddess was called Bonghe. The lesser gods served as mediators between man and Yauba, the Supreme God[76].

Nvaka held a position as the most revered god among the Yandang people, holding cultural relevance and authority. Acknowledging supernatural and unquantifiable similarities with neighboring ethnic groups, particularly the Mumuye, differences in the mode of worship and reverence were noted[77]. In summarizing The traditional religion practiced among these ethnic groups, several key points emerge. Firstly, there is a notable emphasis on ancestor worship, a phenomenon documented by Hamman[78]. Secondly, religious practices entail the observance of rituals and the celebration of cultural and annual festivities. Thirdly, while acknowledging the existence of a creator, these groups underscore the importance of mediators and intermediaries between the creator and humanity. Lastly, variations primarily lie in their approaches to festivals and sacrifices, as discussed earlier.

Introduction of Islam

The emergence of the Muri Emirate finds its roots in the Sokoto Jihad led by Shaykh Uthman bin Foduye in 1804, with the formal establishment occurring in 1817 following a campaign against the Kona people. The Fulbe community played a pivotal role in consolidating diverse populations and territories under the Muri Emirate, which now spans the Northern and a significant portion of the Central zones of Taraba State[79]. Historical records from Fremantle indicate that by 1904, the Muri province included three administrative divisions: Muri, Ibi, and Tshendam, with Muri and Ibi covering most of present-day Taraba State[80].

According to Balutu, Modibbo Hammarua, brother of Modibbo Buba Yero, the founder of the Gombe Emirate, first made contact with the area constituting the Muri Emirate around 1806. However, it was in 1817 that Modibbo Hammarua officially established the Emirate, reigning until 1833 after receiving the flag from Shaykh Uthman b. Foduye. The Fulbe Jihadists peacefully traversed Jenjo land during their movement, migration, and expedition, fostering cordial relations with the locals[81]. Another source suggests the Fulani presence in the region dates back to the reign of Taipu, the 6th traditional Kur of Kona, believed to have arrived around 1756[82]. Balutu asserts that Islam's introduction in the latter part of the 18th century in what later became the Muri Emirate was facilitated by Hausa and Kakanda traders, alongside Fulbe Jihadists. He notes that until the late 18th century, the Jenjo people were exclusively pagan[83].

The establishment of the Muri Emirate represents a significant historical milestone stemming from the Sokoto Jihad of 1804 and its subsequent formalization in 1817. The Fulbe community played a central role in uniting diverse populations under the emirate's umbrella, shaping the cultural and religious landscape of the region. The introduction of Islam, facilitated by various actors including traders and Fulbe Jihadists, marked a transformative period in the emirate's history, altering religious practices and societal dynamics. Understanding the historical context of the Muri Emirate provides valuable insights into the region's development and cultural evolution over time.

Introduction of Christianity

Accounts regarding the introduction of Christianity in Wurkun Land vary. According to Ajiya (2004), missionary endeavors to propagate Christianity began in Wurkun Land in 1907 with the involvement of J.G. Burt, while G.W. Guinter also visited the area in 1923 for the same purpose[84]. On the other hand, Tanko suggests that Bishop Samuel Crowther visited Muri in 1854, potentially being the first Christian in the area, although he didn't have the chance to spread the Gospel in the Wurkun hills. In 1923, Rev. C.W. Guinter initiated a new mission in Bambur, officially starting his missionary work on December 20, 1923[85].

Balutu emphasizes that it was in the early part of the 20th century that the Sudan United Mission of America successfully introduced Christianity to Jen, indicating Christianity's appearance in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone around the first and third decades of the 20th century[86].

The introduction of Christianity in Wurkun Land is marked by divergent accounts regarding its inception. While some sources attribute the beginning of missionary efforts to individuals like J.G. Burt in 1907 and Rev. C.W. Guinter in 1923, others suggest earlier visits by Bishop Samuel Crowther in 1854. Despite these discrepancies, there is consensus that Christianity took root in the region during the early decades of the 20th century, with substantive missionary activities commencing around 1923. These varying narratives underscore the complex historical development of Christianity in Wurkun Land, reflecting the multifaceted nature of religious encounters and missionary work in the region.

Unity in Diversity: Religious Pluralism in Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone

The religious fabric of the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone reflects a rich tapestry of beliefs, encompassing traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity. Before the advent of Islam and Christianity, the indigenous population predominantly adhered to traditional beliefs, characterized by a reverence for

intermediaries connecting humanity with the natural world. These traditions comprised a diverse array of cults and deities, each serving distinct functions and roles[87].

The pervasive influence of Islam and Christianity in the region has transformed it into a multi-religious landscape, as observed by Ali[88]. Despite this transformation, a minority within these communities continues to uphold traditional religious practices, often rooted in a deep connection to ancestral traditions and cultural heritage[89]. For instance, Ajiya highlights that in Karim Lamido Local Government Area, elders from the Kiyu and Shomo tribes actively practice traditional religion[90].

The Wurkun people, known for their inclusive nature, have facilitated interfaith interactions through intermarriages, economic engagements, and political affiliations with diverse ethnic groups. This openness has attracted traders, missionaries, and clerics from various religious backgrounds, gradually diminishing the prevalence of traditional religious practices[91].Balutu notes that, despite the growing impact of Islam and Christianity, pockets of traditional religious adherence persist in certain communities. Churches and mosques coexist alongside traditional shrines, illustrating the cohabitation of Christian, Muslim, and traditionalist communities[92].

The blending of cultures and religious customs within Wurkun land has fostered strong bonds with neighboring ethnic groups, resulting in unique practices and interactions. Converts to Islam may exhibit conservative attitudes towards traditional religious practices, while Christian converts maintain more open interactions[93]. Gurama notes that converts to Islam in certain regions may adopt a conservative attitude towards followers of traditional religion, whereas Christian converts maintain more open interactions[94]. Bitrus suggests that Christianity was embraced more readily in Wurkun Land upon the arrival of missionaries, possibly due to its minimal impact on traditional religious practices[95].

Despite these dynamics, harmonious relations prevail among followers of traditional religion, Islam, and Christianity in the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone. Festive occasions like Christmas and Sallah serve as moments of communal celebration, reinforcing the spirit of unity amidst religious diversity[96]. Muhammad affirms that adherents of different religious beliefs have lived together peacefully, with occasional minor conflicts emerging in recent time[97].

This comprehensive exploration of religious pluralism underscores the coexistence of traditional beliefs, Islam, and Christianity in the region. The inclusion of diverse scholarly perspectives enriches the narrative, offering

nuanced insights into the historical and contemporary dynamics of religious practices. Despite occasional minor conflicts, the essence of harmonious relations among adherents of different faiths in the Taraba Northern Senatorial Zone remains intact.

Cultural Diversity Among Ethnic Groups in Taraba North Senatorial Zone

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries, the Middle Benue Region was characterized by diverse communities speaking different languages or dialects. This linguistic variety contributed to the development of unique cultural features that fostered unity among the numerous ethnic groups within their respective societies[98].

Among the Fulbe community, there exist unwritten codes of conduct known as Pulaku, which comprise core principles such as Munyal (patience and fortitude), semtede (modesty and reserve), and hakkilo (care and thoughtfulness)[99]. Pulaku also involves initiation ceremonies, reflecting the blend of ancestral customs and adherence to moral teachings from the Qur'an and Hadith. Superstitious beliefs like Keuto-tira, related to herd protection and multiplication spirits, were prevalent, showcasing the diverse traditional practices within the Fulbe community[100].

Furthermore, there are enduring un-Islamic festivals like Soro and Gani among the Fulbe, indicating the coexistence of these customs with Islamic beliefs. The mention and swearing by Pulaku held significant favor among some Muslims, surpassing even the reverence for the names of Allah and His Messenger[101]. This diversity in traditional practices within the Fulbe community highlights the intricate cultural dynamics of the region during this historical era.

The Bandawa ethnic group follows a tradition of age-group initiation, where youths are required to belong to Bandawa or recognize neighboring groups like Kunini, Lau, Minda, Jen, Jukun-Kona, among others. This initiation occurs approximately every seven years and involves various activities such as learning about history, customary laws, wood carving, mat weaving, hair plaiting, dream interpretation, songs, and dances. The purpose of this practice is to form peer groups and instill knowledge, discipline, fortitude, and privacy among the youths, exposing them to the hidden effectiveness of the Bandawa heritage. The Bandawa community exhibits a well-developed social organization based on family relationships, extending from male ancestors to clans and ethnic groups[102].

Among the Jenjo ethnic group, the Mihu festival includes organized societal hunting at the onset of the rains, followed by Khew dancers bidding farewell to cult leaders for the season. Conversely, the Yandang ethnic group celebrates the Tumasan hunting festival in April every year in the Lau Local Government Area[103].

The Mumuye community observes the Belle Festival, a multi-faceted cultural celebration held during the dry season in January each year in Zing. Additionally, the Mantau Yam Festival of the Mumuye is celebrated around July[104]. ew yam harvest festivals, commencing in June in central areas in Yorro, continue in various regions, involving different groups at specified intervals. The Belle festival, akin to the Mantau festival but conducted in Zing, signifies the end of guinea corn and millet harvests in January without the customary hunting of animals. The Pugong and Golong clans mark the beginning of the new year and conclude corn harvesting with the Dondong festival in February, while the Sesee Ceremony in the Pugon area serves as a farewell to the spirits of late relatives who passed away one to two years ago[105].

The socio-cultural activities of ethnic groups in the Middle Benue Region during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were characterized by linguistic diversity, cultural integration, and the practice of unique traditions. These cultural practices serve as repositories of knowledge, discipline, and identity among communities such as the Fulbe, Bandawa, Jenjo, Mumuye, and Yandang. Understanding and appreciating these socio-cultural activities offers insight into the past and fosters a deeper appreciation for the diversity and resilience of the ethnic groups in the Middle Benue Region.

Perspectives on Governance Among Ethnic Groups

The political dynamics of the diverse communities in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone, historically and presently, have been closely intertwined with religious institutions. Religion assumes a crucial role in establishing socio-political authority among these communities, with religious leaders or priests occupying significant positions within the political framework[106].

According to Elijah, Hussaini & Abdulaziz, the Bandawa traditionally functioned under a theocratic political system, led by the Nechwe. This system featured a hierarchical structure where various officials handled executive, judicial, and legislative functions. The establishment of the Muri Emirate in 1817 introduced a new political arrangement, with the Ku-Sho (Village Head of Bandawa) appointed by the Emir of Muri, assuming a central role[107].

The Kona people, administratively, embraced a centralized government headed by the Kuru and a council of Seventeen members representing the

Seventeen clans. Seven king makers, including the Wunkir, Kashar, Khrwhar, Khngbana, Sinigha, Sikani, Wuru, and Sinkani Janabanibu, played pivotal roles in governance. The Kuru, considered a sacred ruler of divine descent, wielded absolute political and religious authority. The political structure also involved key figures like the Kajan, Kawu, Wunkhri, Siniga, Kangbana, Sunu, and Kinihow[108].

In contrast, the Yandang ethnic group lacked a centralized political system and relied on a council of elders to govern each community. The introduction of ward and village heads occurred with European contact in the 18th and 19th centuries in Gorobi.[109]

Similarly, the Mumuye did not establish a centralized political system in their early history. Their leadership structure was fragmented, with each group settling independently under its chosen leader. Authority was derived from councils of elders within families or villages, typically linked through patrilineal lineages[110].

The Fulbe Kiri, both in Northern Nigeria and Cameroon, did not operate under a centralized political system. Their leadership was organized around extended family units, and although Fulbe clans occasionally formed camps for collective concerns, their leadership was influenced by Islamic teachings, with succession determined by inheritance[111].

The common feature across these ethnic groups in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone is the coexistence of religious and secular leadership, with community leaders deriving their authority from religious endorsement[112]. This highlights the interwoven nature of human relationships with religious dominance over societal structures in the region.

The diverse ethnic groups within the Taraba North Senatorial Zone have developed distinct political systems shaped by the complex interplay of religious and secular leadership. From the theocratic model of the Bandawa to the centralized governance of the Kona people, and the absence of a centralized system among the Yandang, Mumuye, and Fulbe Kiri, each community has charted its unique course in political organization. The coexistence of religious and secular authorities underscores the significant influence of religious institutions on political dynamics, emphasizing the close connection between spirituality and governance. As these communities navigate their political heritage, the convergence of religious and political realms remains a defining aspect of the political landscape in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone.

Overview of Economic Activities Among Taraba North Senatorial Zone's Ethnic Groups

The economic landscape of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone has been characterized by a diverse array of activities, dating back to before the establishment of the Muri Emirate. Agriculture, serving as the economic foundation, was supplemented by fishing, hunting, mining, pastoralism, and handicrafts. Land and water, vital means of production, were controlled by clans and families and managed by their leaders. Trade, encompassing local, regional, and long-distance transactions, also played a significant role in the economy before 1817[113].

Agriculture remained the primary livelihood within the Muri Emirate, with crops such as groundnuts, cotton, maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava, and yams being cultivated, alongside the rearing of cattle, sheep, and goats along the Benue and Taraba valleys. Mining activities included salt extraction and galena mining near Wuro Julde, as well as iron deposits in the Mumuye territory[114]. The zones's favorable geographical location, well-drained by the Benue and Taraba rivers, made it conducive to agriculture, fish farming, cattle rearing, and poultry farming. Abundant mineral, marine, and aquatic resources further contributed to economic progress[115].

Agriculture continued to dominate economic activities, with a variety of crops cultivated across the state, including rice, maize, millet, groundnut, beans, oil palm, sugarcane, guinea corn, yams, cassava, coconut, and timber. Alongside agriculture, organized hunting, trading, transportation, and local industries added to the economic vibrancy of the state[116]. For instance, the Mumuye people were recognized for their diligence, engaging in peasant farming, pottery, blacksmithing, and livestock rearing. Hunting, salt-making, and fishing were also significant economic pursuits, with different ethnic groups specializing in various crafts[117].

Similarly, the Kona people were predominantly involved in farming, accounting for over 70% of their population. The transition to cash crops during the colonial era aimed to align with the economic interests of colonial administrators, disregarding traditional subsistence farming practices[118]. The Bandawa ethnic group, located in the former Wurkum and Lau Districts, diversified their economic pursuits, including livestock rearing, subsistence farming, fishing, hunting, wood carving, mat weaving, leatherwork, and blacksmithing. Notably, leatherwork encompassed the crafting of various items from hides or skins, such as sheaths, sandals, drums, and dancing kits[119].

Comparing the economic development among ethnic groups, especially before and after the creation of Taraba State, presents challenges. Evaluating economic activities involves intricate assessments based on income, education, and occupation. There is a recognized need for a comprehensive comparative study on the socio-economic activities of various ethnic groups, taking into account metrics like education, income, and wealth for a thorough understanding[120].

The economic landscape of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone reveals a diverse array of agricultural, industrial, and trade activities among its various ethnic groups. From agrarian pursuits like farming, livestock rearing, and hunting to skilled craftsmanship seen in pottery, blacksmithing, and leatherwork, each community has made distinctive contributions to the zone's economic vitality. The interplay of traditional practices and the influence of colonialism has shaped the economic terrain, leading to the transition from subsistence farming to cash crop cultivation.

Conclusion

The exploration of religious, socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics among the diverse ethnic groups of the Taraba North Senatorial Zone offers a rich tapestry of heritage, tradition, and resilience. Across centuries, these communities have navigated a complex interplay of religious, political, and economic factors, shaping their identities and interactions within the region.

Religiously, the coexistence of traditional practices, Islam, and Christianity underscores a spirit of tolerance and mutual respect, fostering harmonious relations among followers of different faiths. The persistence of traditional beliefs alongside the influence of organized religions reflects the zone's cultural richness and diversity.

Politically, varying governance structures, from theocratic systems to decentralized councils of elders, highlight the adaptability and autonomy of each ethnic group in managing its affairs. The historical evolution of political institutions, influenced by religious and secular authority, underscores the intricate balance between tradition and modernity.

Economically, the transition from subsistence farming to cash crop cultivation, coupled with traditional crafts and industrial activities, showcases the resilience and adaptability of these communities in the face of changing socio-economic landscapes. The need for comprehensive comparative studies on economic activities among ethnic groups is evident to inform sustainable development strategies.

Recommendation, In light of the comprehensive exploration of socio-cultural, political, and economic dimensions, several recommendations emerge to foster inclusive development and preserve cultural heritage in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone:

1. Encourage Dialogue and Collaboration: Facilitate interfaith dialogues and cultural exchanges among ethnic groups to promote understanding, tolerance, and social cohesion.
2. Support Research and Documentation: Invest in research initiatives to document the rich cultural heritage, oral traditions, and historical narratives of ethnic communities in the zone. This will ensure the preservation and dissemination of indigenous knowledge for future generations.
3. Promote Economic Diversification: Develop sustainable economic strategies that leverage the diverse skills and resources of ethnic groups, focusing on value-added industries, agro-processing, and eco-tourism. Empower local artisans and entrepreneurs through training, access to markets, and financial support.
4. Strengthen Governance Structures: Foster transparent and inclusive governance systems that respect traditional leadership structures while promoting accountability, equity, and participation at all levels. Strengthen capacities for conflict resolution and community mediation to address emerging challenges effectively.
5. Foster Education and Awareness: Promote education initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity, promote multilingualism, and instill pride in indigenous heritage among youth. Raise awareness on the importance of preserving cultural practices, languages, and intangible heritage through community-based programs and advocacy campaigns.

By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can work collaboratively to build resilient, inclusive, and culturally vibrant communities in the Taraba North Senatorial Zone, ensuring sustainable development and prosperity for generations to come.

Author Contributions

Bello Ali: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Salihu Lawal**: Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Investigation.

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Conflict of Interest

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