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Preface

Azaghvana means 'I say!' in the Dghwede language, and this statement in the way it was expressed was also used to refer to the Dghwede as distinct ethnolinguistic group. The subtitle 'A fragmentary history of the Dghwede of the Mandara Mountains' implies that we are putting our Dghwede protagonists at the centre of the ethnographic narrative while writing their history from the grassroots, and at the same time our aim is to embed their oral historical perspective into the wider subregion of the northwestern Mandara Mountains. My ethnographic work began in 1981 among the Mafa on the Cameroonian side of the wider subregion, and in 1994 I started working in the Gwoza hills and lived among the Dghwede, but withdrew in 2010 because terrorists of Boko Haram had invaded their mountain homeland. This led to the death of many and destroyed their collective memories as montagnards. Between 2012 and 2016 many of my Dghwede friends fled the mountains and adjacent plains. They now live in refugee camps or are trying to rebuild their lives elsewhere, while the Gwoza hills remain too unsafe to return and conditions of life there have changed beyond recognition.

It was due to witnessing the destruction of the Dghwede culture before my eyes that I decided to write this book from a personal perspective. I had already made several attempts to write about the Dghwede and what I knew about the ethnography of the Gwoza hills in general, but I felt a growing sense of dissatisfaction in not putting my Dghwede friends at the centre of it. There was also the critique I have harboured for quite some time about ethnographic writing in general, which is in my view the increasing tendency of ethnographers to enjoy writing for each other more than translating and discussing the oral testimonies of their protagonists. This led me to imagine how the Dghwede as survivors and future historians of their past would want me to write. In the course of my quest for such proclaimed authenticity I felt increasingly inadequate but decided to see it through. The result is this fragmentary narrative which also aims to fill a regional gap, and my only defence is that I have been doing cross-border fieldwork in the area for several decades.

In 2003 I published *The Way of the Beer*, a work about the Cameroonian side of the mountains, which is a re-enactment of history through rituals carried out among the Mafa who are also terrace farmers of the Mandara Mountains. The Mafa are the immediate neighbours of the Dghwede and I was very interested in how their ritual culture could be read as oral history. In 1994 I was awarded a grant by the German Research Foundation (DFG) to begin ethnographic work in the Gwoza hills, because as a result of colonial history they had been neglected by ethnographers. In Part One we present a summary of the ethnographic survey I made at that time, and introduce the reader to how I experienced the Gwoza hills before the occupation of Boko Haram. In Part Two we learn that the Dghwede massif, with Ghwa'a at its centre, was once an early arrival zone from where other groups evolved. The pre-colonial past of the Gwoza hills also includes Kirawa as the first capital of the Wandala, but we also consider the stone ruins of the DGB site in the Mafa area to be part of the wider subregion. In the chapter on colonial history we present the Gwoza hills as an Unsettled District under British indirect rule, where a conflict emerged between the Dghwede and the new colonial elite in Gwoza town who wanted to bring about their downhill migration.

Part Three presents Dghwede oral culture by contextualising fragments of their history with what we learned in Part One and Part Two, and also by ethnographically connecting the Gwoza hills with the rest of the Mandara Mountains. We achieve this by contextualising Ghwa'a, as early arrival zone from Tur, with similar south-to-north migratory traditions of the wider subregion, which includes migratory traditions of the Mafa from the DGB area. Throughout Part Three we present the interconnected ethnographic fragments from Dghwede with the aim of forming a shared history from the grassroots, and critically underpin the perspective of our oral protagonists with paleoclimatic and other early key sources. By examining our source material along the lines of a narrative of a pre-Copernican worldview we reconstruct the Dghwede way of life as a sophisticated historical achievement in which

sustainable food production was central. The terrace farming strategies of this key group of the semi-arid most northern part of the Mandara Mountains were indeed unique.

Perhaps one of the most unique features of Dghwedè terrace culture of the past is revealed in our reconstruction of adult initiation, a tradition that had ended by the late 1930s. It shows how important it was to have a system of emergency food storage ritually embedded in the culture and that it was dependent on alliances formed along kindred ties. Another aspect is the complexity of cyclical rituals linked to the seasons, which was a consequence of the high population density necessary for the labour-intensive farming system. We will show how the chemical fertiliser promoted during colonial times to replace the traditional animal manure eventually led to a reduction of ritual density. Guinea corn (sorghum), alternating with millet and beans as part of the subsistence economy of crop rotation, had the greatest cosmological significance, but the guinea-corn year lost its bi-annual ritual importance and farming for a modern market economy increasingly took over.

The terrace fields connected to the farmsteads had been manured with animal dung over the generations, a practice deeply embedded in their cosmological way of thinking. This was manifested for instance in the rainmaking and cornblessing rituals as 'blessings from above and below this world', and every guinea-corn year the travelling bull festival also ritually renewed the peaceful unity of Dghwedè. Dghwedè cosmology was very localised however, and the family ancestors who had kept the land fertile and passed on their practice were imagined to also exist locally in multiple mirror worlds below this world. We will see how the Dghwedè concept of socio-economic reproduction can be connected to their cosmographic view of the world which also had a gender aspect, and this will be illustrated in the vernacular stone architecture we have reconstructed in great detail. The Dghwedè also believed in the communal reincarnation of twins, and there were rituals in which twins were brought into the house after birth by their former parents who had been identified by means of divination.

Mountain tops visible from afar were important cosmographic manifestations, and we will describe the role of Durghwe, the most northerly rain shrine of the Mandara Mountains, which was ritually linked to Ghwa'a as the early arrival zone from Tur. Its three rock pillars were seen as three granaries and each pillar was said to represent one of the three neighbouring ethnic groups. Durghwe also played a regional role in crisis situations, and in late pre-colonial times the Dghwedè of Ghwa'a held the custodianship for such regional demands. We will also show that in pre-colonial times ethnicity was most likely not the main factor behind the idea of Dghwedè belonging. This was connected with the high population density needed for the continuation of terrace farming, which led to frequent population pressure and changes in terms of local group formation. We suggest that the locality aspect of the dense ritual culture might have led to kindred alliances across neighbourhoods, and that perhaps a shared language played a stronger cohesive role than clan and lineage membership.

There are many more complexities of Dghwedè culture we will describe, explore and illustrate, by relying primarily on the interpretation of our oral protagonists rather than on preconceived ethnographic theory. However we will use my ethnographic research among the Mafa of Gouzda and Moskota for comparison, to contrast some of the Dghwedè cultural variations. We will also point out the many shortcomings in my own ethnographic research, the full extent of which I did not realise a couple of years ago when I started to write this book. This means that writing it has also been a learning process for myself as area specialist of the northwestern Mandara Mountains, and by openly admitting this I encourage the reader to be critical of my interpretations and conclusions. I nevertheless hope that I have managed to present this fragmentary history of Dghwedè culture as a valuable contribution, for the Dghwedè themselves and also to fill a gap in wider regional knowledge. The Gwoza hills have been neglected by ethnographers for far too long, and reconstructing the past Dghwedè way of life from oral testimonies will not only serve Dghwedè survivors but also future historians who are interested in the Mandara Mountains in their geographical entirety.

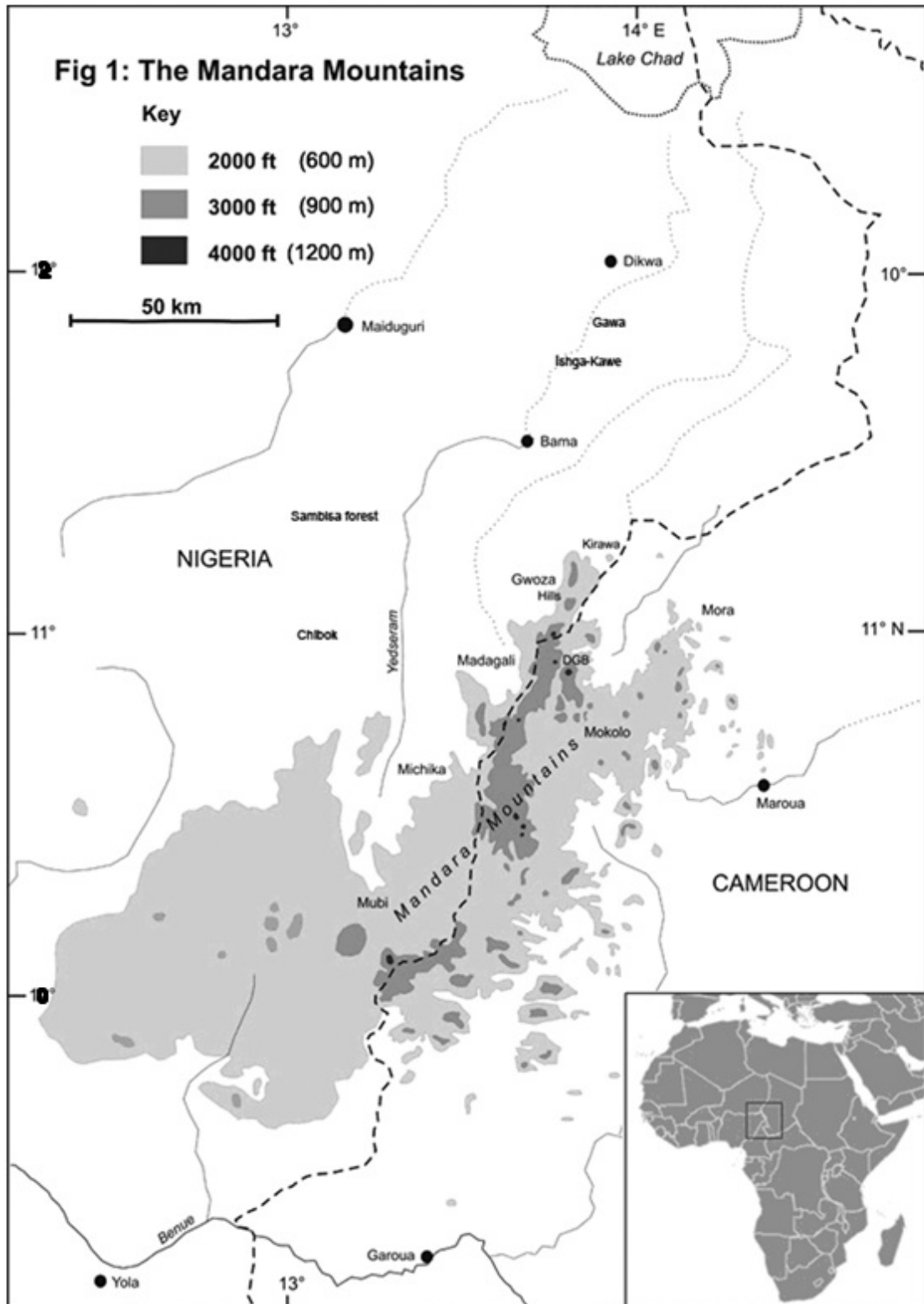


Figure 1 gives an overview of the wider region, showing the Mandara Mountains situated between the Benue river in the south and Lake Chad in the north. We recognise the international border cutting across the mountains, separating northeastern Nigeria from the far north of Cameroon. We can see how the Gwoza hills are sandwiched between the DGB stone ruins and Kirawa, the former ancient capital of the Wandala state. We see the main massif of the Mandara Mountains running from north to south on the Cameroonian side, while the Gwoza hills form the top end of that massif, reaching like a peninsular into the semi-arid northern plain in the direction of the increasingly shrinking southern shores of Lake Chad.

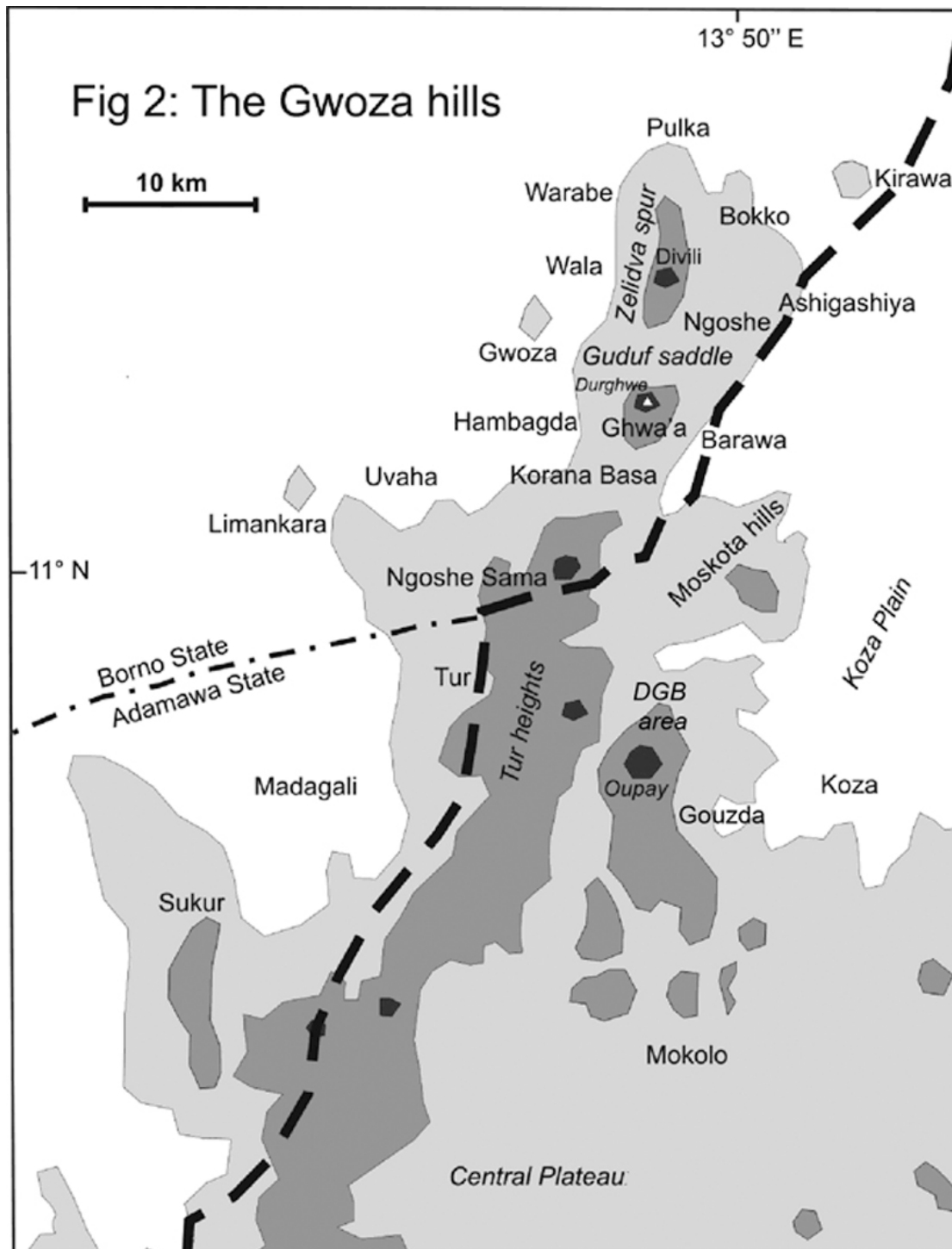


Figure 2 gives a detailed view of the Gwoza hills, with information on the topography and important settlements of the Gwoza Local Government Area (Gwoza LGA), including Ghwa'a and Korana Basa which are the main administrative units of Dghwedé. Ghwa'a was where I had my research station. For the elevations please refer to the key in Figure 1. In Figure 2 we see how the international boundary separates the Gwoza LGA from the Cameroon side, following the Kirawa river to its source in Ngoshe Sama. The Gvoko of Ngoshe Sama are the southern neighbours of the Dghwedé and still belong to the Gwoza LGA. We can see how the Borno state boundary separates the Gwoza hills from the Tur heights, the latter belonging to Adamawa state. We link the DGB stone ruins and early terrace farming to the 15th century when Kirawa as the capital of the pre-Islamic Wandala started to become a centre of transregional trade.