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THE GWARI TRIBE IN ABUJA EMIRATE

BY

MALLAM SHUAIBU NA'IBI AND

ALHAJI HASSAN, MAKANAM ABUJA

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*Mallam Shuaibu Na'Ibi and  
Alhaji Hassan, Makamam Abuja*

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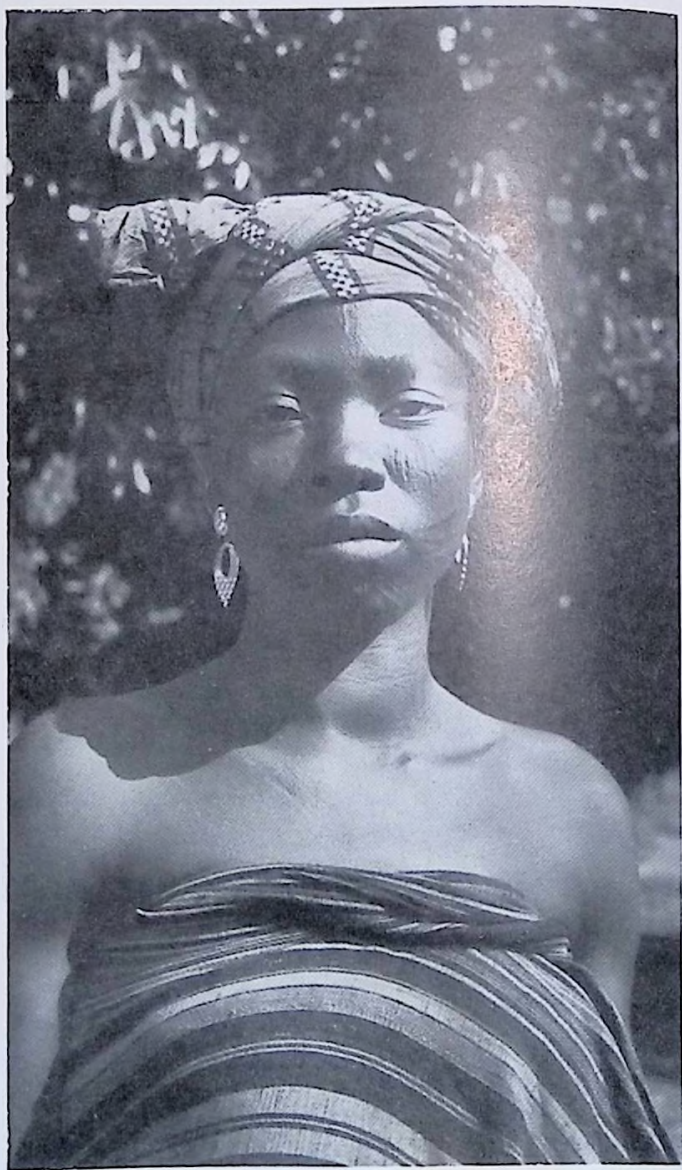
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*Cover drawing by B. P. O. Onobrakpoyi*

11 May

12 May 1964

THE GWARI TRIBE IN ABUJA EMIRATE



*Gcarin-Yamma girl from Sumakwa*

N S R

*The Gwari Tribe  
in Abuja Emirate*

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*By*  
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Translated by P. M. G. Scott

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*A Gwarin-Genge Chief, Esu of Ija*



*Yam collection*



*Calabashes in a Madalla market*

## *Introduction*

THE GWARI ARE A LARGE TRIBE scattered over Benue, Niger, Zaria and Kabba Provinces, but this essay deals only with the two groups of Gwari living in Abuja Emirate: the Gwarin-Genge and the Gwarin-Yamma (The Gwari of the West). The Gwarin-Genge call the Gwarin-Yamma 'Gbawyi' and the Gwarin-Yamma call the Gwarin-Genge 'Matayi'. They understand each other but their language differs in dialect and pronunciation. The Gwarin-Genge are more courageous and daring than the Gwarin-Yamma; in olden times they were among the best in the army of Abuja. The titles of Jarmai and Hauni—Emir's Body-guards—were exclusively held by the Gwarin-Genge; they were the chief warriors in times of war. Jarmai Kauran-Chachi is a notable figure in Abuja history. But the Gwarin-Yamma devote their main energies to farming and are the greatest producers of yams in the Emirate. They also grow cash-crops like cotton, benniseed, calabashes and palm-kernels in large quantities. The Gwarin-Yamma again are divided into two sections: those who live south of the River Usuma in the Kwali area are called 'Sumakwa' and those who live north of the River Usuma in the Paikon-Kore area up to Izom are called 'Zubakwa'. The 'Zubakwa' Gwarin-Yamma have adopted most of the Koro and Hausa customs and they practise circumcision. Both sections speak the same language and differ only in certain customs.

Until after the arrival of the British almost all the Gwari, who number more than half the population of the Emirate, lived on hilltops, preferably amongst rocks, as a means of preserving themselves from attacks by their enemies. In the last fifty years most of these hill villages have been abandoned for more spacious settlements in the valleys and plains with easy access to farmland.



# I

## *History*

IN MR C. L. TEMPLE'S BOOK *Northern Nigerian Tribes and Provinces* it is stated that ' . . . it is possible that they (the Gwari) are indigenous to Zamfara and the districts stretching eastward to the south part of Zaria Province, and their religion and customs may be compared with those of Bassa, Kamuku and Kambbarri who came from the same neighbourhood and who carry loads on their shoulders . . . '

The Gwari of Abuja say that they came from Bornu where they were subjects of the Koro. The present chief of Madalla, Salihu, heard from his forebears that the Gwari were living with the Koro in Bornu and when the Kanuri drove them out they scattered into Kano and Zaria Provinces. When war broke out in Kano the Gwari of Madalla were living there with the Koro of Zuba near a town called Kakuma: both were scattered again and wherever the Koro went the Gwari followed them. It was the chief of Sagwarinpa who led the exodus from their home in Kano to Zaria, then into the area now forming Abuja Emirate first to Lasunta near Guje and then to Jiwa. From Jiwa they went to Gwarinpa. At last they came to Zuba and found the Koro already there. The Koro gave them a place to live on the top of the hill. The reason for the name Madalla was that when they first came their chief had only one son so when his wife bore a second he exclaimed 'madalla' ('Thanks be to God!') in his joy. Their seventh chief was also called Madalla and it was he who founded the present town and was also the founder of the famous Madalla Market in 1927. The Chief cannot give an exact date when his people left Kano but it seems to have been about 1720.

The chief of Ija-Gwari, Sauki, says that his people came from the Dutsen Dala quarter of Kano City. From Kano they went to

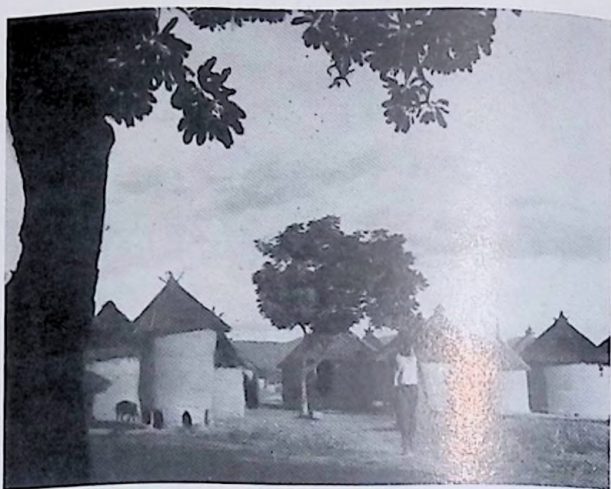
#### THE GWARI TRIBE

Kujeni near Sarkin Pawa in Minna Division. They left Kujeni because of a chieftaincy dispute and went to Jere and thence to Gujeni. From Gujeni they came to Lahunta where they stayed for some time. On a hunting expedition one of them discovered a better site about four miles south-east of the present town of Ija. They moved there and called the place 'Gwayipa', the name of the man who led them from Kujeni. The origin of the name Ija was in their practice of catching people and dragging them into slavery; for *ja* is the Hausa word to draw or drag. When their chief dies they arrange with the Koro of Ija to hold for them the knife that is the symbol of office, in order to prevent quarrelling among the contestants to the succession. They paid tribute to the Habe king of Zaria. In the sepulchre of their chiefs they retain a metal lamp and models of horses which they brought from Kano, also more than 40 stones and bones of animals. They say that whenever a chief died they put one stone and a bone from an animal killed in his time in the tomb. So the number of stones and bones shows the number of chiefs. The Ija people were great warriors; they rebelled in 1830 and again in 1893; it took Abuja some time to quell the risings. It was not till 1952 that they left the old village and settled on their present site.

The Gwarin-Genge of Bwari, 18 miles east of Abuja, came also from Kano. The chief of Bwari, Yaro, reports that their people came from Bwaya, a town in Kano. Two men called Tayabete and Kumbayi with two women came on a hunting expedition to the Abuja Emirate about 1730. They first settled at Kayimwa ('The hill of runaway monkeys'). From Kayimwa they went to Bwari hill. They named the place 'Bwaya', the name of their former town in Kano. The name 'Bwaya' was also explained by the story that when they arrived on the hill the wives of the chief asked for a place to pound corn and so the chief said 'bwaya' (—bwa = pound, ya = here—) or 'pound here'. The Gwari call the place 'Bwaya' but Hausas say 'Bwari'. They lived with the Koro whom they found there but later the Koro left the place and then the Gwari of Bwari transferred their allegiance to the Koro of Dogon-Kurmi. In 1936



*Madaikiu Kwali*



*General view of a Gwari village*



*A Window in a Gwari mud hut*

## HISTORY

during the time of their chief, Zamani, they came to their present site.

The Chief of Garki, Jesalo, said that his people came from Kurabo, a town in the present Zaria emirate. They could not remember when they came to Abuja but they found the Koro of Aso already settled. From Kurabo they went to Shipe, which was first founded by a hunter. From Shipe a member of the chief's family went to Garki hill and settled. Another member of the family went to Gwari-Tsauni and settled with his people. The Gwari call the town of Garki 'Payi' meaning hill, but certain Hausa raiders who attacked Garki and found it impregnable said 'gagara ci' ('unconquered') and that was how the name 'Garki' was derived. It was during the time of their wise and able Chief Badeje that they came down from the hill and settled in their present site just after the British conquest.

The Chief of Diko, Kaura, and his Councillors cannot remember when their ancestors came to Diko. They said a hunter called Kawun came from the Plateau and settled in Diko. He belonged to the Jarawa Tribe and was related to the Kanuri on his mother's side. He first settled on the hill on the old site of Diko. There are three stories about the origin of the name Diko. One was that the Koro who were living there before them called them '*diko*' meaning strangers. Another story was that when the Gwari of Diko asked the people of Gwazunu to give them yam seed they gave them that kind of yam seed which is called '*diko*'. Another explanation was that when they came they found Fulani living there whose headman was called Diko, which is the Fulani title for the head of a band of the Fulani tribe. Although the date of the arrival of Kawun's followers is not known it is said that they found the Koro of Gwazunu in their present site while Ija, Kabo and Abuci were already settled. For this reason they cannot have come there long before the arrival of the Habe from Zaria. The Gwarin-Genge still call Diko 'Kawun'.

When the Habe Zagizagi were driven out of Zaria by the Fulani they passed through Diko on their way to Zuba and received a

#### THE GWARI TRIBE

warm welcome from the people. In 1893, Yaro, the Fulani Emir of Zaria, during his unsuccessful attack on Abuja had his camp in Diko at the site of the present Leper Colony. Diko and Ija fought against each other and Jegaje, chief of Ija, carried the women of Diko away to slavery. The people of Diko came down from the hill to their present site after the British occupation.

There are two terra-cottas in the sepulchre of the chiefs. The regalia of Diko are a knife, an arrow and a ring. These are supposed to have been brought by Kawun, the founder of the village.

All these Gwarin-Genge were at one time living in what are now Kano and Zaria Provinces. Even now they go to Kano villages in the dry season to buy dogs. They all came first to Abuja on hunting expeditions and found the Koro already settled there.

Now the original homes of three Gwarin-Yamma villages have been traced—these are Kwali, Gwako and Paikon-Koro. Kyama was the founder of Kwali. He came from Nakpanku, a village near Gawun on a hunting expedition, about 1744 A. D. He settled on the hill where he found a baobab tree which the Gwarin-Yamma call 'Kwali', so they called his settlement by the name of the tree, 'Kwali'. He found that the Koro tribe in Shada were the owners of the land and it was the Koro who appointed him to be chief of the new settlement at Kwali.

It was during the time that Wayi was chief that the Fulani came into the country occupied by the Koro, Bassa and Gwarin-Yamma, going first to Kilankwa; from there they went to Yelwa. From Yelwa the Fulani went to Pai where they found the Bassa already settled. The Fulani raided the Koro of Shada but the Koro did not want to fight so they fled to Zuba. The Fulani also overcame the Bassa of Pai and took possession of their land. When the Koro of Shada fled to Zuba, the Bassa of Pai asked the Kwali people to follow them and join forces against the Fulani but the Kwali people refused; they said that they preferred being under the Fulani to following the Bassa. Then there was fighting between the Bassa and the Gwarin Kwali. The other Gwarin-Yamma rose against the men of Kwali because of their refusal to follow the Bassa. Then

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the Fulani of Pai Kwali helped to put the Bassa down. It was shortly after this that the Habe Zagizagi came from Zaria to settle in Abuja.

In the days of their chief Maza the forces of the Fulani Emirs of Lapai and Bida raided Kwali. When Ayinza was chief the British came. Then he and his people left the hill top and settled on the level ground. Later they moved near the Boloden stream and then to their present site.

The Gwarin-Yamma of Gwako came from a village called Gula in Nasarawa Emirate on a hunting expedition and settled on part of Zuba's land. The village of Gwako got its name from a tree with sweet fruits. They do not know exactly when they came but say that the Kwali people were there before them.

The Gwarin-Yamma of Paikon-Kore came from Paikon Minna on a hunting expedition and also settled on land belonging to Zuba. The Gwarin-Yamma of Dobi and Ibwa came from Paikon-Kore. As they grow many calabashes so the village was named Paiko to signify the place where calabashes are grown.

## II

# *Gwari Customs*

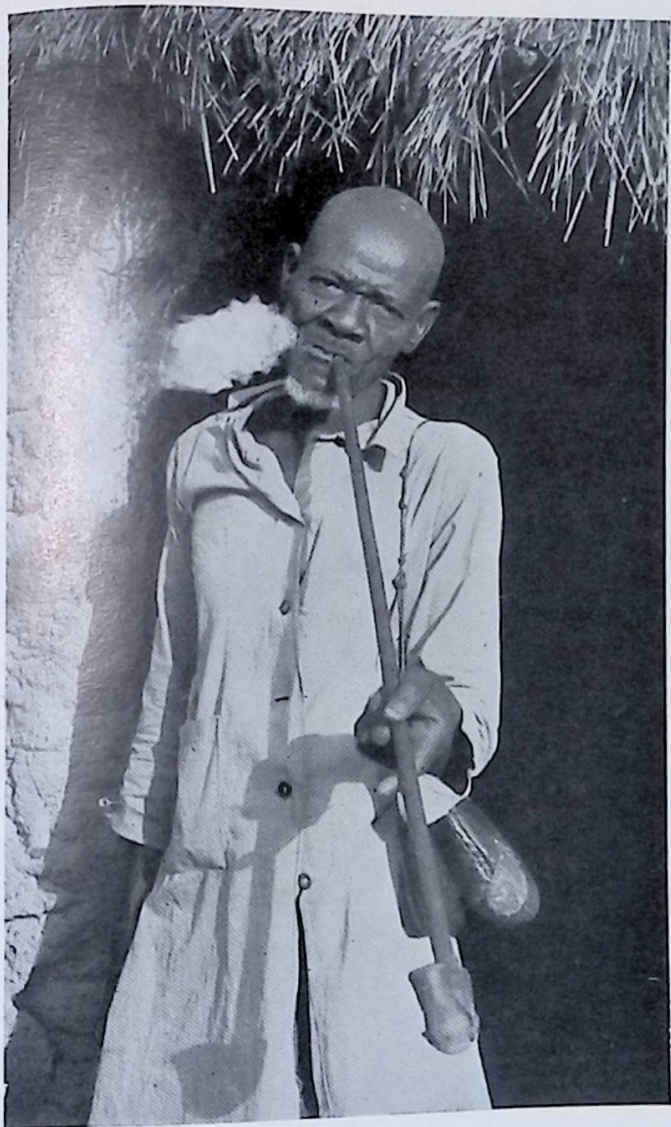
### *and village organisation*

THE GWARIN-GENGE and the Gwarin-Yamma are alike in their organisation. Both have a council of elders and chiefs, for whom they have adopted titles used by Nupe, Hausa and other peoples. They call their chief by the Nupe title of 'Etsu' and have title holders like Madawaki, Galadima, Wambai, Dallatu, Kuyambana, Makama, Barde and Barwa. They divide their villages into wards. The people in each ward appoint a chief's representative to look after the hamlets. In olden days these collected tribute and sent it to the chief. Each small chief sent his tribute to the head chief. Every chief has a council of elders which meets to discuss the affairs of the village.

For their houses the Gwarin-Genge build small round huts clustering close together. In every house there is an entrance hall. Every wife has a sleeping hut and a corn bin of her own and keeps her water and firewood separate from the others. Children have separate huts for the boys and the girls. There is also a 'juju' hut. The husband has no hut of his own but sleeps in his wives' huts in turn changing as it suits him. He uses his entrance hut as a lounge and the head wife is responsible for having a fire in it. In every village, ward or hamlet they build a large hut for all the women to use for grinding corn and collect ten or more grinding stones in it for the women's use.

The Gwarin-Yamma have the same type of house as Gwarin-Genge except that the Gwarin-Yamma keep their huts for wood and their corn bins outside the compound. There is also a corn bin for the husband built inside the compound.

Most of the Gwari are of middle size, not too tall and not too short, and mostly black in colour with only a few of lighter com-



*Smoking a yard-long pipe*



*A huge Kwali pot*

## CUSTOMS

plexion. They are brisk and hardy. The women shave their heads and wear black cloths. They use corn stalks as earrings. They go about bare-headed as do the men who wear a loin-cloth and a skin apron. The older ones wear a sleeveless jumper and a large cloth thrown over the shoulder. The chiefs wear trousers, a gown and cap. The cap is made of cloth woven with white and black threads called 'saki'. On ceremonial occasions the chiefs wear a red fez and turban, carry sticks and wear slippers or sandals. The other people too wear a cloth, the men with caps and the women with headties. Both men and women smoke tobacco in a pipe about a yard long.

Some of the Gwarin-Yamma carry their loads on the shoulders and others on the head. Both men and women stain their bodies with pounded camwood. The men wear Hausa gowns of any coloured cloth that takes their fancy, trousers and a cap. Only the chief usually wears a turban and red fez.

All Gwari grow food crops like yams, hungry rice, maize and corn. They also grow such cash crops as cotton, benniseed, peppers, soya-beans and groundnuts. The women collect sheanuts and make sheanut oil. They also make locust-bean cakes. They tap palm wine and make native beer with guineacorn. The Gwarin-Yamma grow more yams than any other tribe in Abuja Emirate. They also grow calabashes. They are more accustomed to communal farming than most other tribes. Each household has a communal farm where every member of the family goes to work before going to his own individual holding. They use the produce of the communal farm for such common expenses as taxes, marriage, naming ceremonies and other family commitments.

The men do the heavy work of weeding, harvesting, ridging and clearing new farmland. The Gwarin-Genge women help with sowing and the carrying of produce from the farm to their houses. Fruits such as locust-beans and sheanuts in uncultivated land belong to the women. They also collect the firewood. They are responsible for the marketing of produce and buying ingredients for

#### THE GWARI TRIBE

the soup. After the harvest the husband gives his wife one bundle of corn for her help during the sowing; she also receives one bundle for every four bundles she carries from farm to the house. She gives some of these to her parents and keeps the rest for cooking and for selling to buy ingredients for the soup. With produce like hungry rice, a woman receives one-tenth of what she has carried. For cotton she receives one whole day's pick for every four days picking. Beans inter-planted with either cotton or yams belong to the women. Bananas and oil palms belong to the husband. Shea-nuts and locust-bean in the farms belong to the farm owner but women can collect these fruits from any tree found in uncultivated land. Dyeing and weaving of cloth or mats, building and thatching, black-smithing and carpentry are men's occupations. Pottery and spinning are women's crafts.

The women of both Gwarin-Yamma and Genge use their own corn for feeding the family from the time of harvest to the time of sowing new crops, then the husband will start drawing from his own corn bin.

#### *Religious beliefs and customs*

Some of the Gwari are now becoming Moslems, some Christians whilst others still practise their traditional beliefs. The Gwarin-Genge of Diko who have not yet become Christian or Moslems provide good examples of Gwari festivals and fetishes. We read in *A Chronicle of Abuja*:<sup>1</sup>

'Of the two different kinds of festivals in the year, the first is held about the middle of March when the first light rain has fallen, in honour of the fetish called 'Karma' who cares for the health and happiness of mankind. The priest of Karma is named Jibada, and he has six helpers. On the day appointed, these six take a black he-goat and a black cock to the fetish place which is at the foot of a huge granite boulder on the east side of the town of Diko and there Jibada slaughters them both. Then the bodies are lifted up

<sup>1</sup> Published by University Press, University College of Ibadan

#### CUSTOMS

and held close over the rock so that the blood may run down on to it.

'When the blood has ceased to flow, they move to a place set apart where a fire is kindled; on this a large cooking pot is set. Then the meat of the goat and of the cock is stewed, a great deal of salt and peppers being added. Meanwhile a quantity of corn-meal is also cooked. When all is ready, it is taken from the fire, and a lump of corn meal is dipped into the stew and then stuck on the rock as an offering to the fetish.

'Whilst all this is going on, the chief of Diko waits with his principal followers at some distance from the rock, for they may not go close to the fetish place, and when Jibada has made his offerings, then he takes some of the food to the chief and his followers who eat it with joy, for this is the food of the spirits. When they have finished, the priest speaks certain magic words to Karma in the rock and begs him to protect the people of Diko. That is the end of the ceremonies and all go back to the town to the open space in front of the chief's compound where they drink beer and dance and make merry all through the night till daybreak.

'Twice a year also, once when the corn-shoots first begin to pierce the earth and again when the ears begin to swell, the Gwarin-Genge hold a feast to the fetish they call 'Dawuya'. This is what happens. When the time draws near, the chief calls together all the headmen of the town to decide on the actual day of the feast and every head of a household is told to bring to the chief a pitcher of beer from his own brew. Should any man steal the corn which has been set aside for this brewing he will fall sick of a terrible aching in the head, for this corn is dedicated to Dawuya. The chief also sends round to the neighbouring settlements inviting the people to the feast, for he is himself the priest of Dawuya whom the Gwari believe to be the spirit of their ancestors.'

The fetish place is a very small hut built of stone, outside the town in what was formerly a forest, and inside this hut there is an earthenware bowl. When the time comes, the chief of Diko goes to this place followed by all the men and the youths of the town

#### THE GWARI TRIBE

(but the women may not go) and there he slaughters a goat and pours its blood in the bowl; it is through the medium of this blood in the bowl that he is able to speak with the spirits of the ancestors. The meat of the goat is cooked and eaten and everyone goes back to the town where the dancing now begins.

At the dancing place, the youths deck themselves out in a costume of plaited leaves of the oilpalm which reaches from head to knee; their faces are hidden in an old net coloured red and by a kind of mask which has eyes at the back as well as in front. No woman may see this dancing, if she does her belly will swell up and she will die. If a woman is caught watching them, the dancers will seize her and beat her severely. This feast lasts for three successive days and is held in the clearing in front of the chief's compound.

In every town there are people whom Gwari call 'Zokuda', the 'wise ones'. If any man has had a troublesome dream, he or she will go as soon as it is light to the house of a 'wise one' to have the dream interpreted. In this way the 'wise one' hears many things and will often be able to warn the chief of some danger which is approaching, or of some mischief which is being hatched in the town. If a man has had a bad dream about another man or woman who, he believes, is trying to bewitch him by thus forcing a way into his mind and taking possession of it whilst he is asleep, he will go in the morning to a 'wise one' who will describe for him the kind of person who is bewitching him, though he will name no names. Then the 'wise one' goes to the chief and says 'All is not well in the town for we have a witch (or wizard) here. You must go and cleanse us of this evil.'

Then the chief takes two young men with him to the hut where the fetish Dawuya, who is the spirit of the ancestors, lives, and he kneels down and speaks to the bowl: 'I hear that there is a witch in our town who seeks to do us harm. I beg you of your great powers to help me drive her from amongst us. Here are two youths whom I bring before you that you may give them authority to go and drive the witch away.' Then the two youths go out and put on the fetish dress and mask which they wear for the dance, and



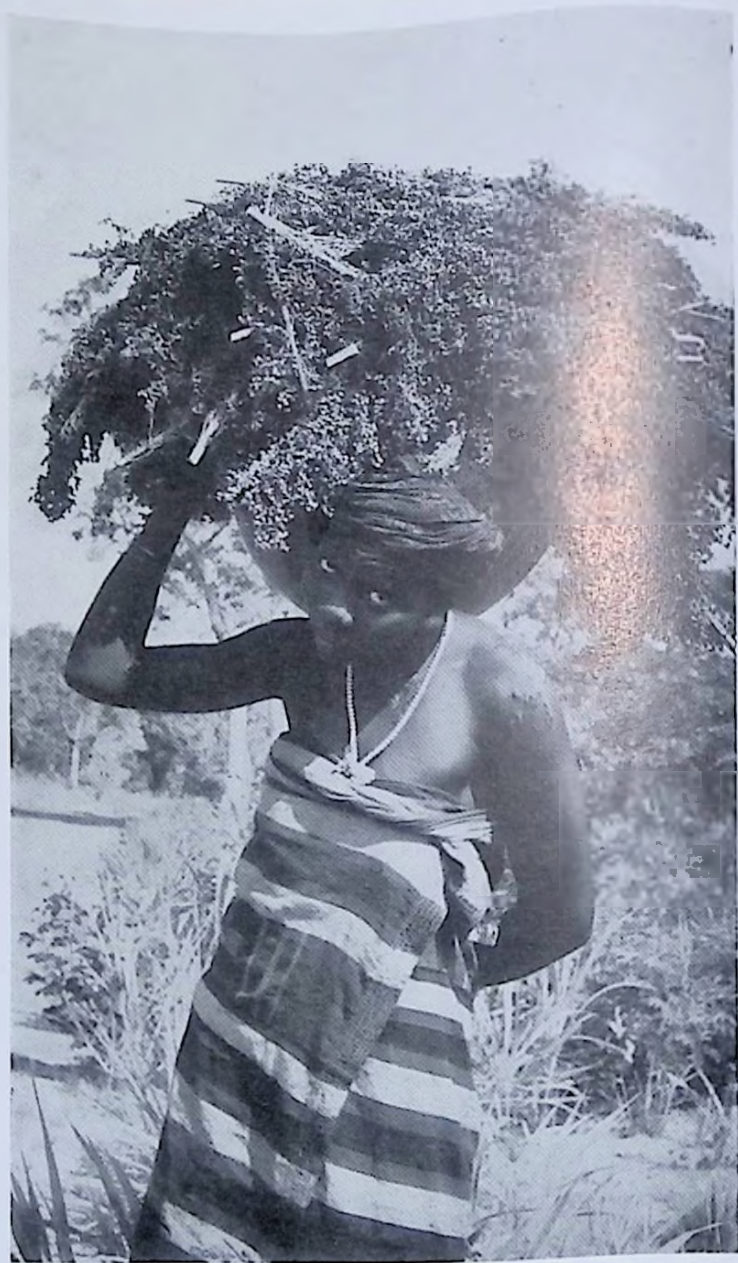
*Gwarin-Yamma woman from Kwai*



*Gueari Ter-*



*a cottas at Kawaku*



*Transporting Guinea corn*

## CUSTOMS

they run through the town crying in a special voice, 'Take heed, you (then follows the description which the 'wise one' has given) and leave this town lest an awful death come upon you'

The Gwarin-Yamma have two fetishes: 'Gunu' and 'Eshan-Gunu'. The festival of Gunu takes place in the seventh month of the sowing season. They regard this month as Moslems regard the month of fasting. During the month they must refrain from quarrelling, all evil deeds and sleeping with women. At the end of the month all people, men and women, gather together at the festival of 'Gunu'. If anyone has done something wrong even by mistake he confesses and will be told what to sacrifice in expiation. Everyone puts on his best clothes. They have a fetish hut outside the village, and no one enters it except in that week. At the end of that week pieces of cotton soaked in a magic potion are distributed to all people who behave so well during the week that they show they deserve honour during the year. Inside the fetish hut is a plentiful store of cotton and of the magic potion. The 'Gunu' god is asked for a blessing and good farming during the year. For some reason that could not be explained the Gwari do not use salt in their food during the 'Gunu' feast.

'Eshan' (Kwali people call it 'Ezhi-Kuci') is a fetish for the town. If anything happens to the town people like an epidemic or raiding, or they suspect anything bad may happen, then the 'Eshan' fetish appears dressed in leaves, and goes round the town. Women, and boys who have not reached the age of puberty, are not allowed to watch.

In the Kuje District of Abuja Emirate there is a village called Kwaku. Near Kwaku is a small hill called 'Kanabui'. The Gwarin-Yamma of Kwali believe that all the spirits of their people assemble in that hill where the spirits of their ancestors live. They say these spirits hold dancing festivals which the spirits of the living people also attend. When they go there, the imaginary gate of the town for the spirits is shut because they do not want the visitors to go back to their homes. They say it is at the time of the shutting of the gate that many people, especially women, fall sick and unless they are saved by magic they die, because their spirits are kept on

#### THE GWARI TRIBE

that hill. If a woman dies in child-birth they say she is married to a spirit at Kanabui hill, for it is said that when any of these wishes to marry a woman he waits till she conceives and when she is about to deliver takes her in marriage; so whenever a woman dies in child-birth they say she has gone to Kanabui. When a man's wife is pregnant he is not happy until she is safely delivered. When a girl is given to a husband she does not love, she says she will go to Kanabui and if she keeps on saying so she is left to marry anyone she loves. If the people of Kwaku wish to hunt on the hill of Kanabui the head of the spirits is notified of the date by a secret method known to the chief of Kwaku. If the head of the spirits agrees, they see plenty of game but if he does not agree they do not see anything. The people of Kwaku also inform the spirits whenever they want to hold their annual festivals. During the festivals they see many strangers and they do not know where they come from. The sound of the spirits' drum used to be heard in every Gwarin-Yamma village in olden days.

#### *Superstition*

A Gwarin-Genge woman with a baby does not go out at night because she is afraid of witches. Some women do not eat fowls until they are past child bearing because poultry peck for their living in the dirt; moreover, because hens are bald-headed the woman is afraid that she will deliver a child with no hair on its head. In the olden days the Gwarin-Genge did not want twin babies and if such were born one was killed, but this is not now done. If a man practising witchcraft or trafficking with ghosts dies, they beat his knee and elbow joints to disable him and the chief sends the fetishes to his grave; they call his name three times and if he answers they then pull away the stone placed over the grave and run away without looking back. By this means they have driven him away and he will never enter the town. A father does not call his child by its real name but by a nickname. Neither men nor women will eat manatee or squirrel.

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Some households of the Gwarin-Yamma of Kwali do not eat the meat of hyena, leopard or red monkey. A pregnant woman does not eat the meat of a goat found dead or of monkey.

### *Birth customs*

When a Gwarin-Genge woman is pregnant she stays in her husband's house until the time of her delivery. When she is about to be delivered her mother or her mother-in-law, or both, together with four old women from among her own relatives or those of her husband attend her. When the child appears it is the mother or the mother-in-law who holds it. One of them sleeps in the room with the woman for four days to help her. The new mother takes a hot bath three times a day for four days after birth.

A Gwarin-Yamma woman at child-birth does not eat pounded yam but only 'tuwo' and a hot gruel mixed with spices.

The naming ceremony of the Gwarin-Genge is celebrated four days after cutting the umbilical cord. When a child is born the father asks a soothsayer which spirit of his ancestors has come back. The child is washed and given the things that belonged to the particular ancestor named; small earthen pots with some blood poured in them. One of the father's relatives will announce the name of the child. Then the mother will take the baby on her back and go out so that everyone can see her with the child. This is the first appearance of the mother and child outside the house since the birth. The child is weaned after two years.

With the Gwarin-Yamma, the owner of the house will inform the chief of the day for the naming ceremony and he will call the elders to assemble at the house where the child was born. An old woman will announce the name of the child. In addition to giving a child the name of one of their ancestors, they sometimes choose one recalling an event that takes place at its birth so that they can remember the occasion and tell its age in later life. A tag from a proverb may also be used.

If a Gwarin-Genge girl conceives before marriage they send her

to live in another hamlet where the chief will not see her and do not bring her back to her home village till after the birth. The ear of the child is pierced to show that it was born before its mother was married. If it is not her promised husband who is responsible for her pregnancy the person responsible will be fined a dog, salt, hungry rice and some money so that the proper rite can be performed to cleanse the village. If it is a daughter of the chief, the person responsible has to produce a black he-goat, a ram, a pot of honey, a sack of rice and a white cock.

The Gwarin-Yamma punish both parties. The man is mulcted of a he-goat and food, the girl of a goat and food. The people assemble outside the village and have a feast, which is said to have cleansed the village. They believe that if they do not do this their farm crops will not do well and if anything bad were to happen they would attribute it to the unpunished illegitimate birth. The Gwarin-Yamma of Ashara and Wako copy the custom of their neighbours the Ganagana; they just marry the girl to her promised husband before she is brought to bed and he accepts the child whether he is responsible or not.

### *Tribal Marks*

The Gwarin-Genge tribal marks vary with the district. Some have two deep cuts between the ears and corners of the mouth with three stripes above each pair; others have a modification of the markings of the 'Katsinawan Laka' (in southern Katsina and South East Sokoto) six to nine cuts on the cheeks reaching from ear to chin, which seem to have affinities with those of the Gobirawa.

In every village the people adopt a set of markings of the body and face to show their identity. When Gwari see the markings on one of them they can at once tell from which village he comes. Men have marks on the face. Women have marks in front and at the back of the body and on the leg. Only the girl who is about to marry has markings on the leg and it is her husband who pays for them. The women have a large cut from the toes to the joint of the knee-



*Gvavi Dance*



*Davuya Masquerade from Gwarin-Genge*

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cap. Some Gwarin-Genge have terracottas with markings similar to those on their own bodies, which are kept in the burial hut of their chief or sometimes on the top of the hut's roof. If the chief dies they wrap the terracotta in a white cloth and take it from the hut until a new chief is appointed and a ram sacrificed. There are terracottas of this kind in Kwaka, Diko, Bwari and Madalla.

The Gwarin-Yamma and especially the Kwali people, used to have markings similar to the Kanuri but nowadays the men do not much go in for marks, though the women continue to have them. They do not have terracottas like the Gwarin-Genge.

### *Training Children*

Both the Gwarin-Genge and the Gwarin-Yamma have the same method of training their young. When a boy is old enough the father takes him to the farm and gives him a small hoe to play with near the farm. When he grows older he is given a small area to clear of weeds and is taught which are the useful plants that should not be cut down. He is also given a small bow and unpoisoned arrows to play with. The girls are taught home craft: fetching firewood and water, cooking and looking after animals in the house. The children, of course, have their games. Sometimes they dramatise hunting tactics, one boy will represent a hare, another a dog and another a hunter and chase each other. Sometimes they have wrestling or dancing, singing and story telling.

### *Hunting*

Gwarin-Genge tribal weapons are bows and arrows, spears, matchets, axes, wooden clubs and swords.

When the Gwarin-Genge have finished cutting thatching-grass in the dry season they leave some places uncut so that they can hunt there. On the appointed day of meeting they assemble and form a circle round the uncut bush which is set on fire to drive out the game. A leg of every animal killed is given to the chief, who

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shares the meat with the ward heads. Leopard and cobra skins belong to the chief. Another method of organised communal hunting is called 'Bago'. An area is marked and all the surrounding ground is burnt: the animals move to the unburnt place and time is given to allow a sufficient number of animals to get in. When the hunters are satisfied that a large number of animals has assembled they go into the bush and kill as many as they can. The Gwarin-Yamma have similar methods but they give a leg, a shoulder and the skin of every animal killed to their chief who shares them with his ward heads.

#### *Marriage customs*

If a Gwarin-Genge man is attracted by a girl he woos her with beer. If she responds, then, after a few days he prepares beer in a large pot and sends it to the parents. If they take it, it means they agree to his marrying their daughter. In the farming season he works on their farm four times, with his friends helping him. The first time he goes with two of his friends, the second with four, the third with ten and the fourth with only six of his friends. He repeats this every year up to four years. In addition to this he gives a dowry. In the olden days he would give up to 2,000 cowry shells, 50 bundles of corn and 10 baskets of hungry rice. He then sends a large pot full of beer and asks for the date to have the marriage celebrated. On that day the girl will be sent to his house. In the olden days about 50 women and girls (now only 4) escorted her to the husband's house, the women and the girls kept on fetching firewood and stayed with her for four days. At the end of four days he sends his wife home and gives her 20 large calabashes full of corn meal to give to her parents and friends. Then after a month they appoint a day in which she will go to her husband's house to live and on that day she is given symbols of her fetish, a white cock, a rib of a cow, hungry rice and a pot of beer. A fetish ceremony is performed before she goes to her husband.

If the fetish of the husband and that of the wife are the same

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they cannot marry: only a pair whose fetishes are different are allowed to marry each other. For example, if a boy's fetish prevents his head being shaved till five years or more after birth or stops him eating fowls for some period after birth, and the girl has the same fetish and the same inhibitions, they cannot marry each other.

When a Gwarin-Yamma boy sees a girl to whom he is attracted he speaks to her. In the evening he goes to her house and stays hidden in a corner until, in the middle of the night, his girl comes out and opens the door for him. He sleeps in her hut but at dawn goes out to his home. If the parents see him they ask him to pay the cost of sleeping in the hut, nowadays one shilling. If he pays, he continues sleeping in the hut. Only if the parents are satisfied that their daughter really loves him do they allow him to come and sleep in the hut.

If the girl agrees to marry him he gets a small leather purse and puts threepence half-penny inside and takes it to her parents to let them know he wishes to marry their daughter. If they accept it he keeps going to their house and greeting them. At the end of one year he gives them one bundle of corn, the second year three bundles, the third year four bundles, the fourth year six bundles, the fifth year eight bundles and the sixth year ten bundles, thereafter ten bundles each year until the girl is married to him.

In addition to this he works in the parents-in-law's farm with his friends four times a year. In the first alone, in the second year with two friends, in the third year with four friends and in the fourth with five friends. In addition to this system of farm service called 'fayetu', twice a year after the marriage the father-in-law prepares beer and calls the people of his son-in-law's village to come and work in his farm.

'Mula' or 'Wali' is a form of separation of husband and wife. The wife may leave her husband without her parents' knowledge and live with another man; if she gets children by the man with whom she is living the husband goes and collects the children and brings them to his house.

*Death ceremonies*

Amongst the Gwarin-Genge, boys and girls who die below the age of puberty, or unmarried adults, or even young people who marry and have no children are buried outside the town without ceremony in the same way as those who die of small-pox or leprosy.

If a chief dies, it is not announced; it is said that he has a headache. They wash him, put antimony on his eyes and dress him in his gown, trousers, red fez and turban as if he were alive. They do not carry him to his grave but they hold him up with their hands, some lifting his feet as if he were walking. They do not take him to the grave until night. On the night he is taken to the grave no one from the royal family is allowed outside his house. There is no drumming in the town for one year. At the end of the year at the new corn harvest they have a week of ceremonies. The new chief leaves the town and goes to another village far away where he cannot hear the sound of the drum. An ordinary person's funeral takes place a few days after the death.

To make the tomb, first they dig a vertical hole like a well for about five feet and then extend it horizontally for about six or more feet. It is inside the horizontal part that they place the dead body. If it is the chief they build a bed inside the hole and sit the body down with its head against the wall, facing east; they place the dead chief's tobacco pipe beside him. The hole is then filled in. If it is not a chief they lay the body facing east. If some one dies whose relatives are in another town he will not be buried until all the relatives are sent for and have arrived; if they cannot come they give permission to bury him and then come afterwards to attend a death ceremony.

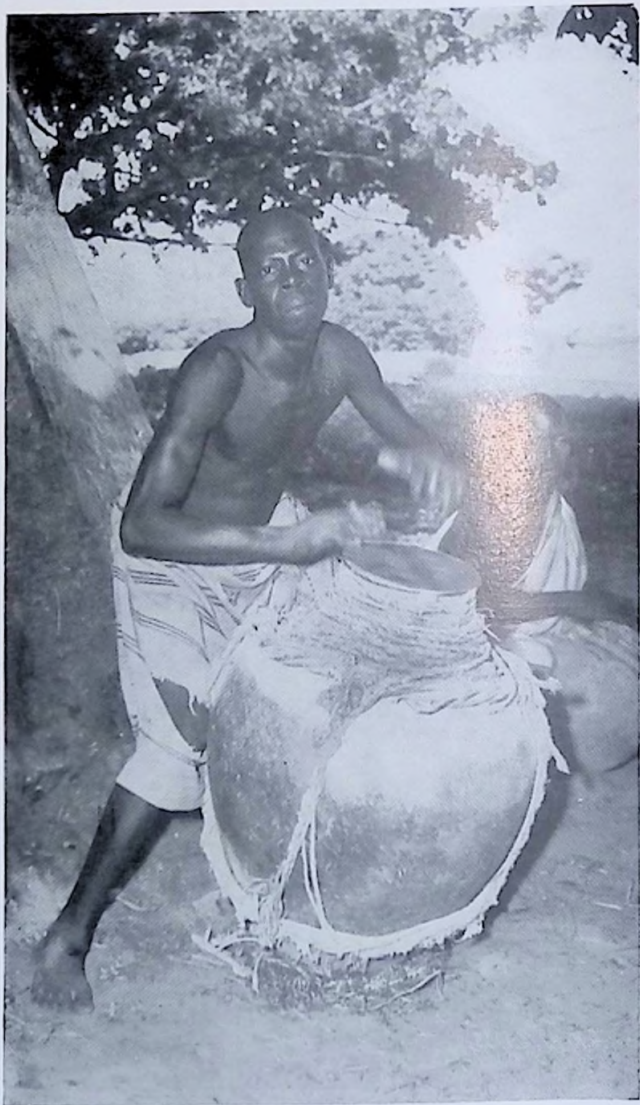
With the Gwarin-Yamma, when the chief dies they dress him in his full regalia of office with money in his pocket, and his bodyguards hold him seated on a chair so that the people can come and salute the dead chief before they take him to the grave. There is no drumming for a week. They kill a ram on the grave of the chief; those who bury him are given the leg of the ram, the rest of the



*Emir of Abuja turbaning new Gwari Chief*



*Gwari Musical Instruments*



*Gwari Pot Drummer*

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meat is given to the people. The burial ceremony goes on for five days. The signal to start mourning and crying is the blowing of a trumpet. The chief's sons-in-law and his friends give the burial cloths and the rams to kill to make a feast for the people. His children and the important people of the town will decide the day for the big feast in which people from distant places will be invited to attend. They have this feast in order to get the blessing of their dead father. It is considered shameful for the family if this big feast is not held. This is like the Hausa 'forty days' death ceremony.

If anyone who is not a chief has died they beat a drum called 'Gbako' (Kwali people call it 'sala'). When the sound of this drum is heard it is known that someone has died. This drum is a special one and the drummers are also special people.

The tomb is the same as that of the Gwarin-Genge but the Gwarin-Yamma provide a mat for the chief to sit on. They also bury more than one chief of the same family in one grave but if they are not of the same family they are buried separately. Also common people of some importance have their graves dug like those of the chiefs.

Both Gwarin-Genge and Gwarin-Yamma believe in witchcraft and ghosts. The Gwarin-Yamma call anyone who successfully foretells the future a wizard. Also if someone gets a better crop from his farm than anybody expects, he is called a wizard. A woman with plenty of money is thought to be a witch.

If a man dies his wives go into retirement, smear themselves with pounded camwood and remain in his house, his relatives feeding and looking after them for five months. On the day they come out from their retirement the people gather at the house at dawn and start crying and yelling as if the husband had died that day. The wives then go to their parents houses and can re-marry. The wives of a chief wait for one year at the end of which a special ceremony is held. For four days before the ceremony they do not go out unless it is imperative for them to do so and then they tie ropes round their waists. After seven days of ceremonies they go to their parents' home and can re-marry.

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With the Gwarin-Yamma, the period of retirement of all widows is three months.

### *Heritage*

If a Gwarin-Genge man is ill and gives up all hope of recovery he makes a will dividing his property amongst his children. The wives do not inherit anything. If he has no children his relatives get the property. A chieftaincy descends to the next younger brother, but if there is no younger brother it goes to the eldest son.

Although a man has died and been buried they take it that he still needs food. If someone from the family who is given the name of a particular ancestor becomes ill he goes to the soothsayer who tells him what to sacrifice to the ancestor in order to get well again. He says the ancestor needs food and a fowl. If the chosen ancestor is a man they say a cock, if a woman a hen. The bird is killed and the blood poured over the grave-stone of the ancestor. When his farm crops are harvested he does not eat until he has given part of them to his ancestor. He calls the names of his ancestor and then throws part of the produce into the bush. If he does not do this they will say whenever he gets stomach-ache or diarrhoea that it is because he is mean to his ancestor.

When a Gwarin-Yamma man dies and leaves a farm and property, the eldest brother next to the dead man takes all the property and the farm. The rest of the family will work in the farm and the produce is used for the family expenses. In some places they give the widows something but in Kwali the widow does not get anything.

### III

## *Musical Instruments*

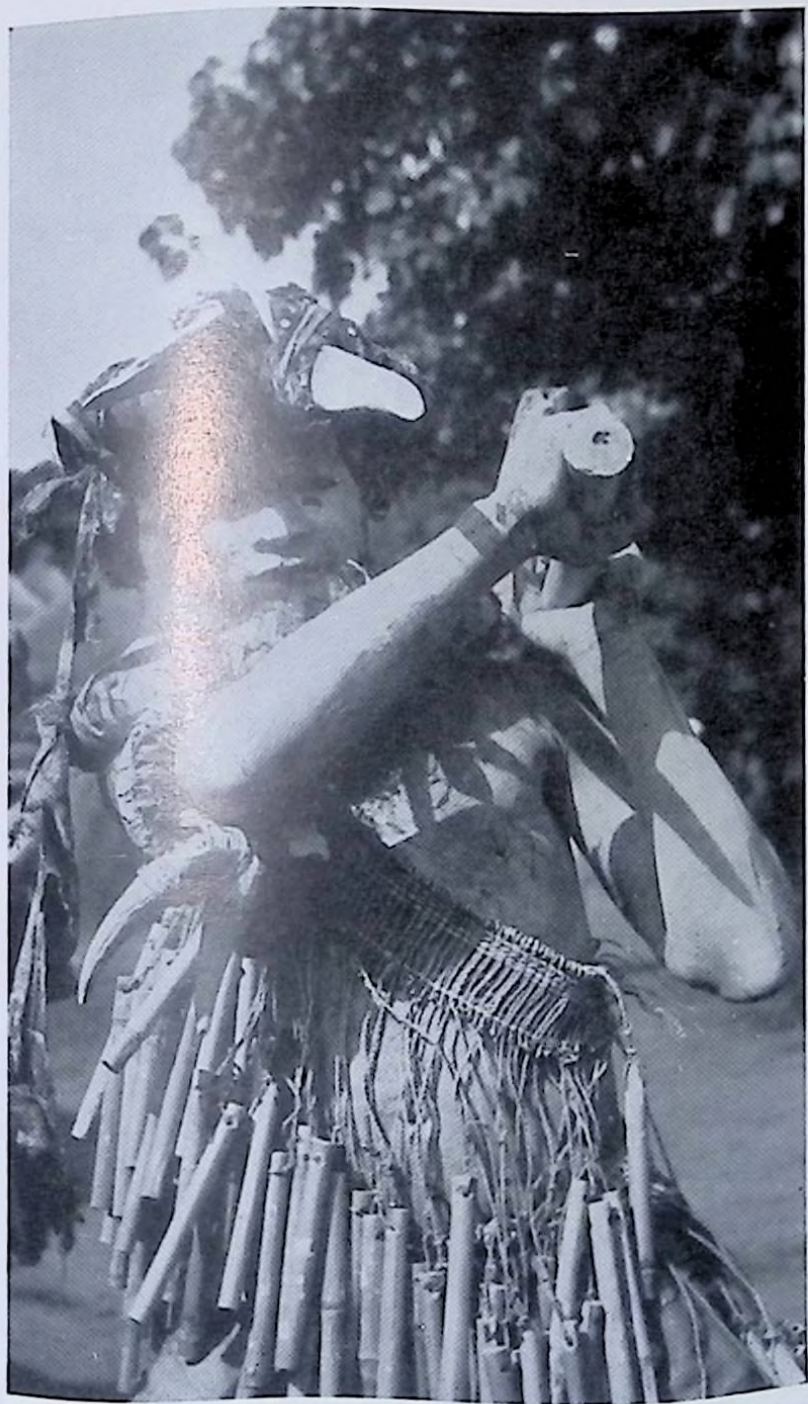
MOST OF THE GWARIN-GENGE VILLAGES have big drums. There is a large drum about three feet high and one and a half feet wide. In the olden days this drum was used to announce the approach of an enemy or an important happening. It is also used as a talking drum, for example, to tell the other towns of the death of an important person or of approaching raiders. A horn is blown as well. When a new chief is appointed they beat the drum and blow the horn. The drummer of this large drum is given the title of 'Gado'. He is appointed with the same ceremony as the chief. He is dressed with gown, trousers, red fez, turban and sandals. In addition to the talking drum they have smaller drums for dances and for their ceremonies; they have flutes and trumpets; they have 'goge' (a large fiddle played with a bow), 'garaya' (a large three-stringed musical instrument played with a piece of hide), 'Kaburu' (a large stringed musical instrument), 'kalangu' (an hour-glass shaped drum used mainly by butchers), 'kuge' (an instrument something like two flattened tongueless handbells joined together and beaten with a small horn, kept by the Barden Sarki (who is the Chief's bodyguard), 'molo' (a kind of guitar, usually three stringed).

The Gwarin-Yamma have a drum called 'Gbagunu'. The drummer places it between his thighs and beats it with his hands, he puts 'akayau' (thin strips of metal with rings let into both edges so that they will jingle when shaken) round both his hands. In the 'gadegba' play one man beats three drums, another beats one drum while the boys and girls dance and sing. In Kwali if someone wishes to get up an entertainment he gives two pots of beer to the chief of the village youth and gets the head girl of the town, 'Karama', with the drummers to play 'gadagba'.

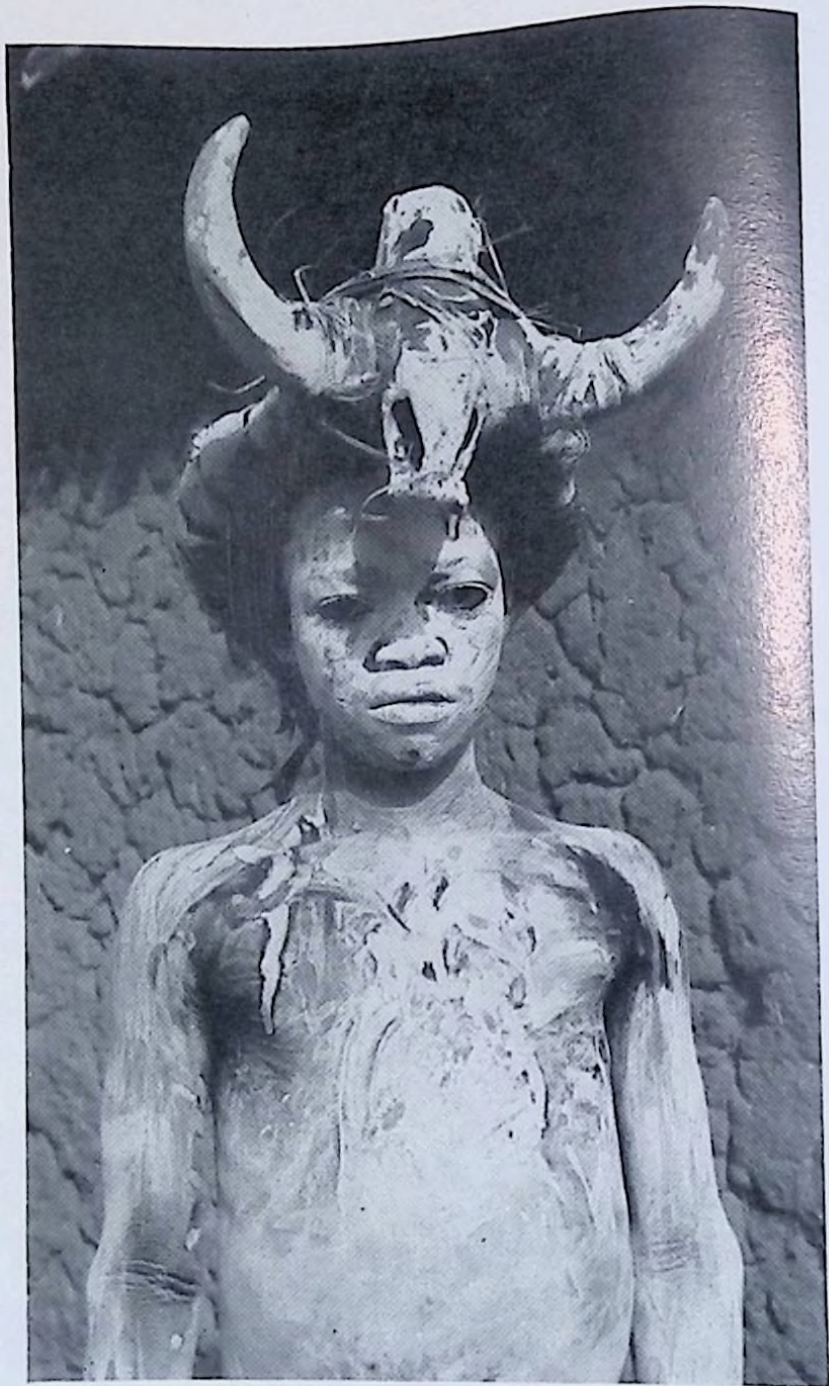
## IV

### *Occupations*

THE GWARI'S CHIEF OCCUPATION is farming. In the olden days the Gwarin-Genge of Igu used to mine iron-ore. They still do blacksmithing, make farm implements, sickles, axes and their handles: they make musical instruments and drums: they weave and dye cloth. The famous Abuja mat 'afutu', the kind of mat which is made only in Abuja in the whole Northern Region, comes originally from the Gwarin-Genge of Mabushi in Bwari District. They also make bags, sacks, mats, baskets, large and small circular reed trays. They keep domestic animals like hens, ducks, turkeys, goats, sheep, dogs, doves, horses and also cattle for fattening.



*Gunu Dancer*



*Gunu Fetish Dancer*

## V

### *Settlement of Disputes*

THE WARD HEADS settle minor disputes. For example, if youths of one quarter quarrel with those of another, the ward heads concerned will settle the quarrel; but if the quarrel involves older people the chief of the village or town will settle it. If it is beyond his power, he takes the matter to the District Customary Court. The District Head, assisted by those of the village heads who are court members, will hear the dispute which may end there or be taken to the Native Authority Court. Also if a wife wishes to divorce her husband, the case is first heard by the village head who tries to settle their differences, and only if he fails is the matter taken to the District Court. If she has a child by the husband, the husband may take the child, but he may no longer reclaim the dowry. If the wife has had two or more children who have died, she repays only half the dowry. The District Court consists of the village head and representatives of the tribes in the district, with the District Head as the chairman.

In the olden days there was a form of trial by ordeal administered by the 'Sarkin Gwaska'. Gwaska is sasswood, a poisonous tree, an infusion of which was drunk by the person undergoing the ordeal. If innocent, the man vomited and the complainant's property was held forfeit; if guilty, he died. This was used by the Gwarin-Yamma in olden days, but not now. In Kwati, if someone was accused and wished to take an oath to prove his innocence, he gave the chief a hen and a he-goat. Then the chief would call the elders of the village to discuss the matter and the man would be asked which kind of oath he wanted to take, the 'Agunu' or the fetish oath. Whichever he chose, he was given. The difference is that the 'Agunu' oath was taken in public and its effect was not as serious as the fetish oath which was taken in a special place in

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secret where women and children were not allowed to go. In either case, after the oath has been administered, the man would eat his food alone for seven days, and he would not shave his head for three years. If nothing happened to him, he would get a hen and a he-goat and sacrifice them before shaving his head; but if he died, his relatives would nevertheless sacrifice a he-goat to prevent the effects of the oath passing on to them. If a man died after taking the fetish oath—and he would die in a very few days if he had sworn falsely—his body was taken by the fetish men and buried outside the village, and his goods were also thrown away outside so that no-one should touch them.

In administering an oath, the Gwarin-Genge used old beer which was kept in a pot inside the fetish hut mixed with the leaves of 'kujeme'. Nowadays all important cases are dealt with by the Customary Courts, and if it is necessary to administer an oath, a matchet, an arrow-head, a piece of meteorite, a large snail shell, a pot used in baking shea-nuts and snake heads are used.

## VI

### *General Administration*

THE GWARIN-GENGE AND GWARIN-YAMMA found the Koro already settled in this land when they came from the East. They became subject to them, and even today the Koro have a natural authority over them. 'Of all the peoples of Abuja, it is the Habe Hausa of Zazzau who have ruled the others from the earliest times and under them the Koro, the Gade and the Gana-Gana. The Gwari have never had any authority anywhere where these other peoples were found, for they came after them and settled amongst them by permission and not by right of conquest'.<sup>1</sup> Chiefs of the Gwari are installed by the Chiefs of the Koro, who also settle disputes about the succession.

On meeting a superior a Gwari would kneel down and sprinkle dust, on his head, while he touched his forehead several times with the palm of his hand. On formal occasions a heap of ashes was provided in place of dust, which was sprinkled in the same way before the man advanced to make his salute. After making his greeting he returned to the ashes and repeated the procedure two times more. This custom is fast dying out.

The Village or Hamlet Head is responsible for law and order in his area. He is usually assisted by a Council of elders. He is responsible to the District Head who in turn is responsible to the Emir of Abuja.

<sup>1</sup> Published by University Press, University College of Ibadan

