

Abba Isa Tijani

Tradition and Modernity

The Gamergu (Malgwa) of North-Eastern Nigeria

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**Tradition and Modernity: The Gamergu (Malgwa) of North-Eastern
Nigeria**

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ABSTRACT

The Gamergu are one of the autochthonous groups in present-day Borno State, North Eastern Nigeria. Their history is one of continual accommodation to the presence of the Kanuri (the dominant ethnic group in the Lake Chad region and the Bornu empire), whose incursions into the lands of Gamergu started as early as the time of the Sayfawa Dynasty who established their capital at Birni Gazargamo in the late 15th century (CE). In the decades and centuries that followed the Kanuri invaded further south where the land was more fertile for agricultural production and where more ‘pagan’ tribes existed to be plundered or converted to Islam. Many communities in the region assimilated Kanuri culture, including the Sao, Marghi and Mandara. The Gamergu population was much more vulnerable to Kanuri attack because of its lack of centralised government and army. They were hence left to defend themselves through their communal affiliations and by retreating further south. The Gamergu had to adapt to the fact that they existed on the border of the more powerful Kanuri Empire at its peak of state formation. Many Gamergu communities were brought within Kanuri political structures whereas some survived at the periphery of the Empire with the help of their local defensive mechanisms. This thesis investigates and documents the cultural and social changes that have taken place in this Gamergu borderland using oral historical records and contemporary ethnography.

The Gamergu have maintained certain elements of their traditional practices which have been blended into contemporary socio-political institutions. Traditional beliefs and practices such as *həle* (ritual performance for the beginning of the farming season) and *zawada* (oath taking) continue to form part of their modern social life. In some cases the rituals are linked to Islamic practice where, for example, the *həle* festivity is combined with the Muslim festival of *Eid ul Kabir* (during the pilgrimage to Mecca). Many decades of frontier life have also enabled the Gamergu to adopt the Kanuri language as their second language and they identify themselves as Muslims. But Gamergu religious traditions are still practised by the people alongside the Islamic religion, whilst domestic rituals associated with the individual life cycle continue to create “Gamergu-ness”. This situation has also enabled the Gamergu people to resist total assimilation over recent decades of living on an expanding frontier characterised by the introduction of modern land tenure and land use systems. Modern agricultural development in many Gamergu communities has influenced the socio-economic growth of the region, leading to an influx of immigrant farmers. Access to land has changed from a system of local access (“land to the tiller”) to arrangements for derived rights institutionalised in the community. The lands of the Gamergu have become a centre of attraction for agricultural production. In the course of this, Gamergu cultural identity, custom and residual land rights have become salient, once more, in contemporary life.

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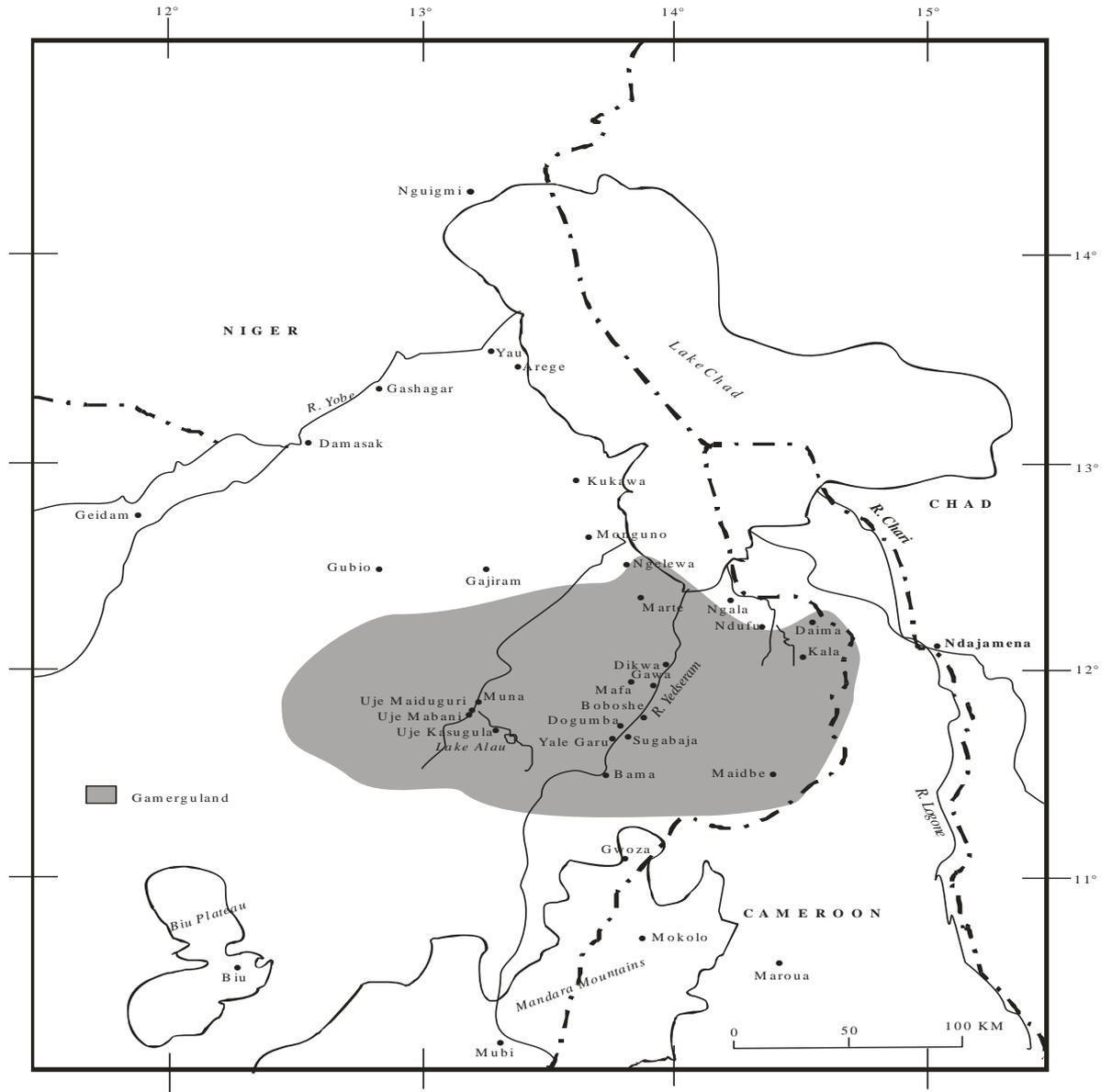
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

It is important to clarify from the beginning the use of the term “Gamergu” and how it is being used in the context of the thesis. The term ‘Gamergu’ came about in reference to the Malgwa people when the Kanuri people, being the later arrivals to the region, referred to them as the aboriginals with the Kanuri word ‘*Ngawarwu*’. Hence the word is simplified to Gamergu. In this study the term Gamergu is used because of its popularity across the region in referring to the Malgwa people and at the same time for the reason that the Malgwa themselves identify with it. Similarly, in the accounts of early travellers to the region such as Nachtigal, Barth and others, as well as in most literature, the same word is used to refer to the people and their language. In this work I will continue this convention, using Gamergu to refer to the people as well as their language. Due to the nature of scattered settlements of the Gamergu in certain areas I will sometimes refer to Gamergu in the context of their area of occupation, for example, such as those in Mafa area as opposed to those in either Bama or Konduga areas. Similarly, ‘Gamerguland’ is used in its wider context of the areas of Gamergu habitation that cut across different district units or Local Governments and even in some cases different Chiefdoms or Emirates (see Fig. 1 below).



Map 1: Gamerguland in the mid 19th Century as reported by Barth and Nachtigal

This thesis will look at the Gamergu situation from two main perspectives. Firstly the Gamergu can be said to be an acephalous society that was at the border of a more powerful and dominant group at its peak of state formation. Then the second aspect is its place as an aboriginal tribe that has emerged today as a frontier polity.

The Gamergu and other similar ethnic groups that exist at the borderland of the more powerful Kanuri society maintain contact and interaction with the centre. This situation therefore opens up for those at the periphery to participate in the political struggle for representation at any given opportunity. But today cultural identity is used by groups in Nigeria as a means to achieving political goals. We can still find clusters of settlements that refer to themselves as Gamergu within Kanuri settlements. There is no doubt that the people have more freedom of interaction and association in the late 20th Century and hence move across the entire State without any threat of war or invasion by the Kanuri leadership. They are able to reach places that could not have been able to reach in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Added to this is the problem of central control by the Kanuri over the Gamergu population in administrative matters that is indicated by the traditional structures put in place. That notwithstanding, the 20th Century also brought about intensive conversion to Islam of the majority of the Gamergu populace. The conversion exercise brought with it increased access to authority and the political hierarchy. Similarly in order for them to survive in the modern society they have availed themselves of access to modern western and Quranic education. These formal education systems were new to them and were out of their traditional context. Even though colonisation contributed towards modernity certainly it did not, especially in the region, alter the traditional set up.

In view of these overwhelming influences and factors that affect the Gamergu people in the 20th Century, what elements persisted over the centuries that could be said to retain or promote Gamergu-ness? It is pertinent, therefore to identify and elucidate on the cultural elements of the Gamergu that survived modernisation or those alternative means through which they express their identity/Gamergu-ness. Those aspects of Gamergu culture that were modified as a result of modernisation to form part of the Gamergu culture in the late 20th and 21st centuries will also form part of this thesis. The work will further look at the ways through which such cultural elements are passed on to the younger generations. It is worthwhile to explore how the Gamergu identity survived in contrast to that of the Sao, which became extinct.

The persistence of Gamergu identity also needs to be put in the context of modern agricultural development in many Gamergu communities that has influenced the socio-economic growth of the region. A focus on this aspect reflects the level of interest generated in the area and how the influx of immigrant farmers influences the socio-cultural as well as political life of the people. Certain institutional arrangements were developed by Gamergu communities in order to accommodate the presence of immigrants around Lake Alau. As a result of its proximity to the capital city Maiduguri and some local Government headquarters, Lake Alau emerged as the area most attractive to immigrant farmers, which has been transformed from an area of communal landholding to modern diversified small scale farming units. The presence of the immigrant farmers and the region's development of modern agricultural techniques, especially in irrigation farming, profoundly changed the life of the people from traditional Gamergu farming families to a more polarised peri-urban social community. The ethnic fusion has also enabled the divergent Kanuri and Gamergu cultures to tolerate each other, paving the way to inter-ethnic marriages.

This work is intended as a primary work on the Gamergu ethnography which will contribute to the ethnography of the Lake Chad region¹. This research could be said to be in response to a call made by Hickey (1985) and other scholars to focus on ethnic groups other than Kanuri since this aspect of multi-ethnic society has been neglected, reducing everything from Borno society to Kanuri.

CONTEXT OF FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the course of this work I have made wide consultation of both written and oral sources, with greater reliance on oral sources due to the meagre literature on the Gamergu. It is important that I stress my background to set the record and to recognise the influence of many of the people that I encountered during the course of my work. My sojourn during the period of my fieldwork before I formally started this doctoral programme was, in most cases, unplanned. Most of my trips were organized in conjunction with members of the *Joint Research Project* between the

¹ Given the meagre literature on the Gamergu, this work will heavily rely on oral traditions and informants. The only detailed work carried out on the Gamergu is that of Dr. Doris Löhr on the language of the people.

University of Maiduguri (Nigeria) and the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt (Germany), who also dictated the directions of the fieldtrips. In almost all the occasions I have never regretted their company or the destinations of our journey as they have been to my advantage, judging from the wealth of their experience in field techniques and literary knowledge at my disposal. Consequently this research work developed as a result of my participation in the Project. I became a counterpart member of the project in 1992 through the recommendation of my professor, the late Professor Wilhelm Seidensticker. My inspiration for field research first came from undergraduate fieldtrips with Professor Seidensticker to many historical sites in Borno. Part of such trips was the voyage along the length of the Kamadugu Yobe (river Yobe) in October 1991. The purpose of the journey was to discover and locate old settlements along the river; and was meant to follow and re-survey Boyd Alexander's voyage in the same area some seventy years earlier. The voyage was made in two phases covering a distance of about 500 km in forty-five days. However, my particular interest on the Gamergu people was inspired by my involvement with the Joint Research Project and interaction with its participants. Among those that contributed to the development of my research interest on the Gamergu was Dr. Raimund Vogels, an ethno-musicologist with whom I had my initial fieldwork on my new topic. Our visits to Gamergu, Kanuri, Shuwa and Kotoko settlements gave me the inspiration to focus on the Gamergu people. His constant encouragement even at the time of my visit to Germany in 1993 made me decide to concentrate exclusively on the Gamergu. Dr. Thomas Geider was another of the Project participants who made me keep the momentum of my research topic further by taking joint fieldtrips to several Gamergu, Kanuri and Kotoko settlements where his focus was on oral literature.

My later association with Dr. Editha Platte and Doris Löhr was the culminating point of my inspiration as I received the most support and direction. Dr. Platte, in particular, spent more time with me in discussing the Gamergu problems pertaining to my current research and we also travelled together on fieldtrips. My recent trip to Frankfurt to work on the literature was on her invitation. Dr. Löhr on the other hand did her work on Gamergu language hence I was fortunate to make joint fieldtrips with her.

Another place of inspiration was the Kanuri Databank Project at the Centre for Trans Saharan Studies, University of Maiduguri where Professor Norbert Cyffer assigned me the task of running the place. The Databank was intended to collate all data on Kanuri language and culture from the members of the Joint Research Project with a view to producing a Kanuri encyclopaedia. Even though the Project was eventually abandoned because of relocation of Professor Cyffer from Mainz to Vienna it gave me the opportunity to make contacts, particularly with most of the foreign members of the Project.

Apart from joint fieldtrips with the various individuals mentioned earlier I have also carried out intensive data collection in different villages of Gamergu with the help of assistants. During the course of this research I have been able to visit a number of villages both of Gamergu and non-Gamergu people in Borno. I have visited some villages along the Kamadugu Yobe from Mallam Fatori in the northeast of Borno State through Yau and Damasak to Geidam, Gashua, Nguru and Machina in the northwest of Yobe State. The visits that were carried out with Dr. Platte have given me some background information on the nature of settlement and culture of the people living in the area since the region has been, for many decades, the centre of Borno occupation. Similar visits were also made to areas southeast of Borno occupied by the Kotoko and Shuwa Arabs and to the areas of Marghi and Gamergu settlements. That notwithstanding, my main focus of study was on the areas occupied by the Gamergu stretching along the shores of river Yadseram and settlements near to Maiduguri. Even though my visits took me to many Gamergu villages the concentration was on some selected settlements across the region. Ishga Kewe is one of the principal villages where I carried out my field work. The village, located southwest of Konduga, is said to be the birth-place of the Gamergu and Mandara spiritual leader (Barkindo, 1989, 35) where he was believed to have disappeared into a tree. Dogumba is another Gamergu village of historical importance, which was a focus of my study. Its neighbour, Boboshe where I briefly worked, also has historical ties to the origin of the Gamergu. Both Dogumba and Boboshe are located on the Bama to Dikwa road to the south of Mafa. Iza Garu, considered to be one of the oldest Gamergu settlements, was another centre of my research. It is interesting to

mention that as a Kanuri person it would have been unperceivable to engage in this kind of work if not because of my association with the academic environment and my wider linkage with experienced foreign academics and more importantly the more accommodating posture of the modern Gamergu society. The more tolerable attitude of modern Gamergu society and their experience of a frontier life have enabled the Gamergu to accept a Kanuri scholar to carry out research on their history and culture.

The work on land tenure in Chapter Eight was a result of research work [during my field research] carried out under a funding by GRET and IIED. The chapter therefore has a separate methodology and the field research was jointly conducted with two other colleagues already acknowledged. The chapter is not intended to stand separate from the rest of the thesis.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

This thesis is divided into nine chapters in order to present the findings of the research in a logical manner. Chapter One has introduced the term “Gamergu” and the issues in focus in the thesis. The introductory chapter has also presented the context of the research and methodology. Chapter Two will discuss, in detail, the migration of the Sayfawa Dynasty into Borno and its subsequent historical transformation in the region that culminated with the El-Kanemi Empire and arrival of Rabeh. Information on the Gamergu complex as well as the theoretical framework of the thesis will be found in the same chapter. Chapter Three on the other hand will delve into the historical origin of the Gamergu and their ancient settlements, their religious beliefs and rituals as well as the nature of the judicial system. Population distribution and migration among the neighbours of the Gamergu is the focus of Chapter Four. The presence of the Kanuri in the region has brought about marginalization of the Gamergu; hence they survived as a frontier society in the region. This Kanuri migration into Gamerguland and subsequent transformation of their major urban centres into modern Kanuri capitals will be the focus of discussion in Chapter Five. The Maiduguri Metropolis, which is now a modern Kanuri centre, used to be at least three districts occupied by the Marghi and Gamergu people.

Maiduguri became the capital of the Kanuri Empire in 1907 and has now developed into a modern multi-cultural urban city. The chapter will further elucidate the nature of Kanuri political administration that affected the Gamergu and taxation imposed by the Kanuri as part of their dominance over the Gamergu population and the region. Certain cultural endeavours that could be said to be influenced by the Kanuri will be the subject of study in Chapter Six. Chapter Six looks at Gamergu lifecycle and cultural identity in the context of contemporary socio-political structures. The individual in this chapter is seen as going through a series of developmental stages and initiations which identifies him with Gamergu-ness. The chapter will also portray the world of spirit possession and its associated *shila* musical performance among the Gamergu and possible influence on this by the Kanuri. Chapter Seven will present the household as a unit of economic development and social interaction. Chapter Eight then presents access to land for agricultural practice. Since agriculture is the preoccupation of the Gamergu population access to arable land forms a crucial part of their economy and the chapter will discuss how the landholding system was transformed to adapt to migrant needs and to those of the community. Chapter Nine then summarises the entire work and discusses the different issues raised on the Gamergu culture. The chapter, particularly brings to focus the earlier problems identified in Chapter Two against the findings of this work. It will also dwell into the different methods of organisation adopted by the Gamergu as a result of wider freedom offered by the 20th and 21st Centuries.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEXT AND THEORY

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT AND ENVIRONMENT

North-eastern Nigeria

North-eastern Nigeria comprises six states of Borno, Adamawa, Taraba, Yobe, Bauchi and Gombe. The area is bordered by three international boundaries. To the north is Niger Republic; while to the east is Chad Republic while Cameroon lies to the east and southeast.

The region has been a centre of great political and economic upheaval. Among the famous historical incursions into the region was, of course, that of the semi-nomadic tribes of Zaghawa who ruled the area since from the 14th Century in what is referred to as the Sayfawa Dynasty. The historical events which followed the arrival of the Sayfawa Dynasty were massive conquest and assimilation of autochthonous populations and the spread of Islamic religion. The political control of the region also greatly facilitated economic gains of the rulers, especially through the famous trans-Saharan trade route with North Africa. The invasion, however, had serious impacts on the socio-economic well-being of the autochthonous and early settlers of the area. The El-Kanemi control of Borno after the demise of the Sayfawa Dynasty continued to exert similar impact. The Fulani Jihad of Uthman dan Fodio also had profound influence on the geo-political setup of the region, especially to the south and west of the area.

The landscape of the region varies from the plain surface of the north with its dunes from the Saharan Desert to the mountainous highlands of the Mandara Mountains and those of Bauchi and surrounding areas. The Mandara Mountains extend into the Cameroon Republic and the region was renowned for its production and supply of iron. The Lake Chad in the east is known for its high concentration of human habitation, which was attracted by the fishing and agricultural opportunities to the population. The river Yobe in the north has also been a centre of ethnic fusion where the Sayfawa Dynasty built a fortress from which they ruled the whole region.

The region is also known for its diversified ethnic groups with their rich cultures and could be said to have the highest number of ethnic groups in the whole country, where the Bauchi area having many linguistic groups (Nengel, 1999).

Borno Region (Geography and History)

Throughout the country the soil contains a high proportion of sand, which increases as one moves northward towards the desert. West and south of the Lake Chad are broad expanses of clay-laden soil, known by the Kanuri as *firki*, which during the dry season of the year becomes as hard as asphalt and cracks in deep fissures, but with the rain becomes a sticky, muddy morass. Vegetation varies from sparse low scrub dotted with occasional trees, usually baobab and tamarind, to heavily wooded areas. The region has as a prominent feature, the ancient beach ridge of Lake Chad referred to as the Bama Beach Ridge (BBR). According to Breunig 1993 and Thiemeyer 1991 the ridge must have been formed before the advent of human habitation 7,000 years BP (before Present). The undulating plains provide the basis for sedimentation and water stagnation; some of the marshes are perennial (e.g. Lake Alau) while the majority are seasonal, retaining water less than half the year. In such an environment the pivot of subsistence depended largely on a reliable and accessible source of water, which is seasonally or perennially available in the ponds, rivers, marshes and lakes. As reflected in the pattern of settlement today, these landforms have provided a basis for human settlement and subsistence in the region. Long-term socio-economic and cultural practices attached to the ponds, which still survive today, are fishing, arable irrigation, animal husbandry, arts and crafts (pottery and leatherwork) and building and construction.

The various loamy soils of the area are known for their good harvests of crops such as groundnut, onions, beans, millet, maize and variety of vegetables like pepper, tomatoes, sorrel and okra. In the depressed zones where the soils are heavier and wetter, and water is more reliable during dry periods, irrigation is practised and vegetables and some root crops like potatoes and cassava and fruits are grown.

The arrival to the area, of the Zaghawa tribe which merged with the local peoples to birth to the Kanuri group had a profound influence on the pre-Kanuri inhabitants. The area east of the Lake Chad occupied by the Kanembu tribe was said to have been invaded by the Zaghawa in the 9th Century CE and advanced down the west side of Lake Chad and ruled the tribes there that were absorbed into the part Arab origin. According to Palmer (1936) the neighbourhood of Lake Chad has since adopted the Kanuri language, though there were some previous languages that survived in some areas. For about two centuries the Kanuri also engaged in combating the Sao, who, according to Meek (1971, vol. 1, 79), successfully maintained themselves against, and even defeated the kings of Kanem, killing four successive Kanem kings between 1346 and 1352. Birni Njimi was the capital since the ninth Century. The Mais abandoned Kanem as a result of vicious civil war which erupted in the late fourteenth Century between the Sayfawa and another branch of their family, the Bulala of Fitri. The wars began during the reign of Mai Daud Nikalemi (c. 1377-86 CE.). According to Brenner (1973, 9) many of his successors were killed by the Bulala and the decision to move to Borno was made by the only one of this series of kings to die a natural death, Mai Umar Idrisimi (c. 1394-8 CE).

The capital of the Sayfawa Dynasty, Birni Gazargamo, was built by Mai Ali Dunamami (also known as Ali Zainami) (c. 1472-1504 CE) after defeating his rivals. In the succeeding three centuries the influence of the Mais would be felt far afield, but nowhere as emphatically as in Borno itself. There the Kanuri nation was born, a mixture of the immigrant Kanembu and the indigenous Bornu tribes, some of which were linguistically related to the Kanembu where they stayed together with. The former inhabitants of Bornu were either absorbed into the new nation or forced beyond its borders. That the Mais never returned to Kanem to live in their ancient capital of Birni Njimi is probably explained by the fact that Borno was found to be more productive agriculturally and better suited to the raising of the many cattle owned by the Kanembu.

Hickey (1985) observed that there was even gradual migration of the Kanuri people to the area long before the disastrous war with the Bulala. Gazargamo was fully

established as the seat of the Mai in 1500 hence bringing the ruler closer to his southern subjects. The language of the court was Arabic, which according to Palmer (1936, 100) shows the old original Berber influence or dominance since the ninth Century had continued both linguistically and culturally. A series of wars were carried out by the Kanuri against the local people, especially the Sao and the Bagirmi to assert their political authority over the area.

However Borno was conquered by the Fulbe in 1809 and they occupied the capital Gazargamo. When Gazargamo was captured Mai Dunama moved to another place and founded Birni Kafela as the new capital of Kanem Borno. Sheikh Muhammad Al-Amin El-Kanemi, a teacher in Kanem, was called upon by the Mai to help in restoring Borno's glory. The Sheikh developed military qualities that proved adequate to defeat the Fulbe and re-captured Borno's capital. Consequently Sheikh El-Kanemi, locally known as Shehu Laminu, gradually took power and established the new capital of Borno at Kukawa in 1814, only six years after he had first appeared on the scene.

Borno suffered another defeat with the coming of Rabeh to the region in 1893. Rabeh was born to Fadl Allah and Zaidan at Halfaya, a suburb of Khartoum (Mohammed, 2000, 71) and entered the service of Zubeir Pasha, who was imprisoned at Cairo in 1870² by the Egyptian Government (Schultze 1968, 28-29; Meek, 1971, vol. 1, 83). It was on the defeat of Zubeir's son, Suleman in 1880 that Rabeh managed to escape with a division of 3000 soldiers and some guns. With this force he passed through Wadai and Bagirmi and destroyed Kukawa in 1893. He established his capital at Dikwa but for fear of his advancing farther the English and the French came into action and he was killed by the French in 1900. His son Fadl Allah carried on the war but was also killed a year later. However, with the destruction of Kukawa by Rabeh, Monguno became the temporary capital in 1902 of Bornu but the Shehu tried to live in Kukawa after some rebuilding of the capital. It was difficult to get together a population in Kukawa again; hence the Shehu moved and built his town in 1906 at Yerwa near the British who had stationed their headquarters at Maiduguri.

² According to Mohammed, (2000, 71) Zubeir was arrested by the Egyptian Government in 1876.

This brief account of the history of Sayfawa and Kanem Borno shows how the Kanuri emerged relatively late in the present Borno State. Hickey states that there had been settlements of Kanuri along the river Yobe from the early fourteenth Century but it was not until Gazargamo was established in the late fifteenth Century that the Kanuri gained effective control over the northern part of Borno. Nevertheless, before the invasion of the Kanuri to the region there were a number of ethnic groups that have made remarkable contribution to the socio-economic development of the area. Among such ethnic groups are the Sao, Gamergu, Marghi and Bura (Pabir).

The Gamergu Complex

Literature on the Gamergu is scanty and in most cases faint mentions of them are made in relation to larger established groups such as the Kanuri and Mandara or even autochthonous groups such as the Sao. The earliest mention of the Gamergu people was made in the writing of Imam Fartua (1970, original in 16th Century) during the reign of Mai Idris Alooma of the Sayfawa Dynasty. Imam Fartua's work translated by Palmer referred to the Gamergu people as one of the pagan tribes that the Sayfawa leadership raided frequently. The raids were meant to increase the slaves of the Mais and at the same time convert the people into Islam.

The accounts of early travellers to the region also provided some insight into the nature of the Gamergu people in the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

On the linguistic nature of the Gamergu both Barth (1857) and Nachtigal (1881, II) claimed that the Gamergu and the Wandala and people of Logone belonged to the "Massa nation". Madziga (1976, 64, 67, 78) also supported this hypothesis when he mentioned that all the inhabitants of the plains and Mandara Mountains are Massa. Similarly Mohammadou (1975) by accepting this perception thinks that the Massa are identical with the Musgun, who are the descendants of the Mulgwa (Gamergu). Even though the Massa can be grouped with the Mandara, the Gamergu, the Kotoko

and many others, Barkindo (1989, 47), however thinks that it is difficult to accept the Massa as the group that formed most of the tribes in the Mandara region.

Some scholars have ascribed the origin of the Gamergu to the coming of three brothers from the East [Mathews (1934) and Lewis (1933ii) in Barkindo (1989)]. On the other hand, Harford (1937, 21) mentioned that the ancestors of the Gamergu originally came from the Zaladiva Peak in the western part of the Mandara Mountains. Barkindo (1987, 34) referred to the Gamergu as culturally and linguistically intimately linked with the Wandala as indicated by the Wandala tradition which stated that both of them once settled together before the Wandala were forced to move south. According to Madziga (1976, 71) the Gamergu resisted the Kanuri raids, whilst the Wandala migrated.

Birma's (1996) B.A. Thesis gave a general account of the history of Gamergu but the most detailed study on the Gamergu people was recently carried out by Löhr (2002). Though the work mainly concentrated on the language of the Malgwa (Gamergu) people she however presented some historical aspect of the people. She described the Malgwa as the original settlers of the northeastern region of Nigeria before the Kanembu people migrated to the area. She also mentioned that a survey carried out in Maiduguri about spread of the language of Malgwa people showed an unexpected strong presence of Malgwa speakers. Löhr further ascribed the triangular area between Maiduguri, Dikwa and Bama as the region of Malgwa settlements of today. The Malgwa people, according to her are settled farmers and fishermen. She referred to Kanuri women that are married into Malgwa families as "Malgwanised where the woman learns to speak the husband's language (and culture). Even though Malgwa people have become Muslims many are still considered as non-Muslims.

The Gamergu are known to have settled in dispersed hamlets without any centralized authority [Schulze (1968, 331) translated by Benton]. He described the Gamergu as dwelling in scattered villages along the course of the River Yedseram. Barth mentioned the Gamergu as a tribe in Borno, once of importance "but which has now lost its independence" and its language as closely related to the Mandara with its

principal villages as Dore, and Dogumba. The industrious and commercial ability of Gamergu was further mentioned by Barth by describing Uje (a Gamergu town) as a market place of considerable importance that was held every Wednesday. The market was situated on the western side of the town and was once surrounded with a wall. Another Gamergu town mentioned by Barth was Mabani which he considered to contain 9-10 thousand inhabitants. He saw the town as prosperous with signs of high degree of wealth in its inhabitants (Barth, 1857, 362-364, vol. II).

As we have observed, Kanembu incursion into Gamerguland, started as early as the times of the Sayfawa Dynasty when they established their capital at Birni Gazargamo. However, the Kanem invaders also assimilated with the autochthonous ethnic groups living along the shores of river Yobe such as the Mowar, Suwurti, Bodawi, Manga, etc. These groups and their languages had since been part of the Kanuri language and today regarded as dialects of the Kanuri language. The Kanembu invaders then, extended their territory toward the Gamergu region in the south where the land is more fertile for agricultural production and at the same time more 'pagan' tribes existed to plunder and convert to Islam. Other groups that lived in the area were the Sao, Marghi and even the Mandara Sultanate. These groups were attacked by the Kanuri leadership from time to time and many of their people were gradually assimilated into the Kanuri culture. However, out of these groups, the Gamergu population was much more vulnerable to attack because of its lack of centralised government and army. They were hence left to defend themselves through their communal affiliations and by retreating further south from the Kanuri attacks.

Despite this predicament they were able to sustain the Kanuri raids over a long period of time as a result of their continued retreat. Nevertheless the Gamergu had to adapt to the fact that they existed on the borderline of a more powerful Kanuri empire at its peak of state formation. They were then faced with the basic choice of accommodation or assimilation by the dominant Kanuri or preservation of a certain degree of independence through retreat. Given this situation that the Kanuri had taken over some of their major settlements such as Uje, Mabani and Muna the

majority of their population assimilated into the Kanuri society whereas a few of them survived through retreat further southward.

This work, therefore, seeks to account for the nature of Gamergu society from an autochthonous polity in Borno region to that of a frontier society. The work will also focus on current events regarding the promotion of the culture in the 20th and 21st Centuries.

In view of my research on Gamergu I intend to discuss the Gamergu complex based on these data:

1. reconstruct autochthonous Gamergu society
2. survival of the group on the frontier of the dominant Kanuri society, and
3. the resurgence of Gamergu polity in an agro-economic perspective.

This kind of work will definitely generate interesting questions regarding the limits of political cooperation for the peoples of African stateless systems. In what ways did such stateless communities managed to establish themselves? To what extent did the frontier condition enable them to re-establish themselves?

Scholars in the past have debated about the conditions of pre-industrial societies with divergent conclusions. Some anthropologists in the early and mid-twentieth century sought to clarify the bases of social control in African stateless societies as that of an “ordered anarchy”. Several studies (Muller 1985, O’Brien 1983, Verdon 1980) have emphasized the difficulty of defining leadership roles and the scope of polity organization in acephalous pre-colonial groups. In addition, Muller (1985) completely discounts the possibility of explaining their organization in causal terms after describing several complex uncentralized polities of the Jos Plateau area in Nigeria as variants on some regional organizational themes.

Horton (1972) developed a model that attributes variations in organization of West African stateless societies to broad patterns of population movement and interactions

between groups. By dividing the pre-colonial societies of this era into three main types, he outlines how differing processes of migration, warfare, and settlement could have produced their sharply contrasting forms of political integration. In areas where farmland was readily available and the population increasing, Horton hypothesizes that West African peoples tended to settle in a pattern of dispersed homesteads, to organize mutual aid among households on the basis of descent, and to augment their territories through uniform outward expansion. This, according to Dillon (1990) encouraged development of the classic form of “segmentary lineage system”, with its characteristic relativity of group alignments and lack of permanent political offices. Such systems, according to Dillon (1990), were found among the Tiv of northern Nigeria and the central Igbo. The second system occurs where geography and population growth had placed uneven pressures on farmland, by contrasting, “disjunctive” migration on the part of families and descent groups produced “dispersed, territorially defined communities” with populations of mixed origin. Under these circumstances, lineages remained the fundamental political support groups, but since it was no longer possible to regulate interactions primarily through descent, more elaborate forms of political organization began to appear. In the third type of stateless system, the “large compact village”, descent groups retained much less political significance such as in societies like Yako and Mbembe of southeastern Nigeria, where warfare had encouraged clustering of the population into defensible settlements, such towns regulated their affairs through cross-cutting institutions such as age grades, associations and secret societies.

Horton’s broad treatment of stateless societies contrasts with the second major perspective on complex acephalous systems in Africa. The scholars who have adopted this line of reasoning find such groups of interest primarily because they may represent the incipient stages of political centralization. In this formulation (Cohen 1978a; Haas 1982; Service 1975, 1978), centralization is believed to occur as community members willingly submit to new authorities because of the benefits that they can provide. One of the earliest examples of this approach can be found in Aidan Southall’s well-known monograph *Alur Society* (1953). In this study Southall analyzed the way in which acephalous groups of the Uganda-Zaire border area had sometimes welcomed Alur chieflets to settle in their midst. According to informants

from the stateless societies concerned, they had acquiesced in this fashion because they had been awed by the self-confidence and rainmaking powers of the Alur chiefs, but also because they had desired help in regulating violent conflicts within their own groups. Yet another reason was that acceptance of an Alur chieflet secured his subjects some protection from the depredations of more powerful Alur chiefs.

The emphasis in more recent work has been upon using comparison to isolate the factors that may encourage voluntary centralization processes like those described by Southall. Harris (1962, 1965), for instance, has argued that the differential development of centralized authority in three neighbouring Mbembe subgroups of southeastern Nigeria was correlated with several factors, including (1) the severity of the external pressures that each faced, (2) the extent to which their populations had been geographically compressed, (3) how clearly they were divided into opposed village units, and (4) the associated intensity of intra-societal conflict.

A final example to the issue of centralization can be found in Cohen's (1974, 1976, 1978a) interpretation of chiefdom formation in northern Nigeria. On the basis of a controlled comparison of the Pabir and Bura groups, Cohen posits that centralization may occur when an acephalous society, threatened by neighbouring states, is obliged to shift from dispersed settlement to residence in a compact, fortified town. Under such circumstances, several factors may encourage acceptance of chiefly authority, including the increasing complexity of administrative problems in the now-sizeable community, the need for more effective mechanisms of conflict resolution in a densely settled town, and the necessity of organizing for a common defence. Certain other forces, such as rivalries between potential leaders and the tendencies toward fission that characterize many acephalous polities (Cohen 1978b) may still inhibit consolidation of centralized authority. However, as Cohen (1977) notes, these impediments can sometimes be overcome by complex arrangements for power sharing, such as the establishment of an office of queen mother that members of a dissident faction may be permitted to control.

Several scholars have employed varying ways to approach conflict among which that of Meillassoux (1978a, 1978b) differs from most previous analysts of acephalous systems by focussing upon effective structures of control within the kinship system. He attempts to understand these by clarifying the social and economic transactions upon which they rest. In his “self-sustaining agricultural society” model, for example, Meillassoux portrays the local farming community as a highly competitive system in which elders base their dominant power upon control of economic resources and nubile women, as well as on alliances with peers in neighbouring groups. His formulation states that given the delayed returns characteristic of agricultural production and the elder’s greater experience and knowledge of farming techniques, they will naturally tend to supervise both production and the family granaries in which the harvest is stored. This permits them to consolidate control over resources on a day-to-day basis. However, their small household groups still face insecurities arising from demographic fluctuations and the difficulties of arranging for reproduction of the productive unit itself. As the elders move to redress such imbalances by collaboration with counterparts in neighbouring groups, they also come to regulate the exchanges of elite goods that function as bride-wealth. This allows them to monopolize control of marriageable women. Warfare further strengthens their hand, since uncertain conditions will tend to limit the contacts of junior males in groups where they might find marriage partners on their own. Finally “ancestor worship” ideologically helps to legitimate the power of the elders.

In a shift from these views on conflict approach Brown (1984) for example, explains Klowe society of Liberia as an informally stratified system in which lineage head-elders prevailed through their control of marital transactions and ties with counterparts in neighbouring communities. His model of Klowe accounts for several distinctive features of that system, including the preponderance of middle-aged bachelors, the fact that marriage was intratribal while trade and warfare were intertribal, and the pattern whereby iron production and the operation of oracles were controlled by lineage elders in certain areas.

Having dwelt on the different approaches to the issue of stateless acephalous societies in Africa I would like to shift the discussion to the problems relating to the study of frontier societies.

Donham (1980) described the unresolved problems in social anthropology and history of Africa; firstly, the analysis of social space, which concerns the definition of units of analysis. It is the practice in both disciplines to assume somehow that “tribes”, “peoples”, or “kingdoms” furnish the unit of analysis, i.e. the cultural area defined by certain uniformity of language, culture, or ethnic identity. In order to overcome this problem in understanding the social organisation of twentieth century Imperial Ethiopia a different approach of systematic differentiation was adopted. This approach was adopted based on the fact that what goes on at the centre of a region or nation such as the case of Imperial Ethiopia is different from what happens at the periphery. Yet the centre and the periphery are functionally interrelated. Hence he replaced the approach of units of analysis defined by uniformity with the ones based on functional interrelationships. This approach therefore implies, for example, that to write histories of peoples in the southern peripheries of imperial Ethiopia is automatically to situate their lives in a wider context than just the south, a wider context defined by the dominance of northern centres.

The second problem involves time. This problem in particular is associated to social anthropologists who traditionally assumed that structural principles can be abstracted from particular historical events, (Donham, 1980) and whatever happens to be found during short periods of fieldwork can be used to infer long lasting “traditional” structures. Consequently, to relate the issue of time to space, one could say that such an assumption requires a postulate of uniform time, a uniform time that persists into the ethnographic present despite the transformations wrought by world historical events like colonial conquests.

In the case of frontiers and borderlands, Tobias Wendl and Michael Rösler (1999,2) refer to them as areas of diverse political, economic and cultural systems that provide illuminating insights into the processes by which cultures and identities are

constructed and negotiated. According to Thompson and Lamar (1981, 7) a frontier is a zone of interpenetration between two previous distinct societies. However Igor Kopytoff (1987, 10) introduced a distinction between external and internal frontiers. An external frontier, according to him, arise when metropolitan cultures expand and attempt to extend political hegemony beyond their perimeters; whereas internal frontiers emerge in politically unrestricted areas, where intruding settlers act and create new societies on their own. Such internal frontiers are mostly to be found in the remote, less populated fringes between two or more organised societies. In this situation, however, Kopytoff's distinction of frontiers enables us to situate the Gamergu complex under that of an external frontier where a State (Kanuri in this case) expands its borders leading the frontier to move. Similarly there is a cultural distance between the Kanuri, with its superior political organisation and Muslim background, and the Gamergu that is seen to be a pagan group susceptible to Muslim attacks. This situation therefore results in clashes, pushing forward, conquest and advancing the frontier. Furthermore, Kopytoff identifies the frontier as being a culturally innovative zone since it provides the stage for constructing new societies and ethnicities. It is in this context that we see the present day Gamergu identity emerging through the use of its arable land by mainly Kanuri people from the urban and peri-urban centres. This situation of invasion of Gamerguland for economic purpose is common according to Donnan, despite ubiquitous animosity and occasional outbreaks of violence, for instance, in the 1980s transborder shopping was very common in Northern Ireland because significantly lower prices of consumer goods attracted traders from the Irish Republic. Similarly the Gamergu as good farmers with fertile land attracted many Kanuri to their region. This association therefore helped transcend entrenched patterns of ethnic and religious strife. The frontier is, nevertheless, on the one hand, an area that could be said to be beyond the control of the regional urban centre and, on the other, is weakly enough controlled by its present occupants that outsiders from the urban centre can move into it with the realistic hope of achieving an autonomous political existence. It presents to the outsiders an institutional vacuum that makes it open to the possibility of constructing in it a new society (Kopytoff, 1999, 33).

Wendy James (1980, 37) in her work on western Ethiopia observed how the aboriginal peoples of the western fringes have had to adapt themselves to the margins of the central Nile Valley and the highlands as a frontier society. The aboriginals were faced with the choice between assimilation and accommodation to the dominant societies they fringe and preservation of a certain degree of independence through retreat. The hot, thickly forested highlands, according to James, insulated the lower valley and served as protection from highland penetration and allowed them to serve as a refuge for those resisting contact with the highlands. In opposition to the model of retreat from highland Ethiopia, James further described that the aboriginal people have alternatively accommodated and even assimilated into the expanding and politically powerful peoples of the highlands.

The work of Clark (1999), on the other hand, examined the environment and its impact on socio-economic history of the Upper Senegal Valley. The region was transformed from the frontier of European conquest in Africa's interior to an administrative centre of a growing political and commercial empire. However, after some decades the dichotomy between core and periphery became more pronounced because the French interest shifted elsewhere, and the entire region was eventually relegated to a marginal position as a labour reserve for other areas of West Africa, particularly the peanut basin of Senegambia.

In contrast to the work of the scholars mentioned in the discussion on frontier and borderland my work on the Gamergu as a frontier polity is viewed in the context of a moving boundary. The Gamergu people have for centuries lived side by side with the Kanuri people who constantly raided them for reasons of expansion of their territory and to plunder for slaves. The Gamergu frontier therefore kept on shifting as a result of Kanuri incursions into their land. The incursions similarly created an opportunity for some Kanuri people to take residence in Gamergu villages. This situation therefore created a different perspective for discussion of the Gamergu frontier away from what the earlier scholars have presented.

Consequently, this Gamergu complex poses the challenge of identifying and analysing the cultural issues pertinent to the problem of such a stateless aboriginal group that existed for many centuries at the periphery of a more powerful Kanuri nation. Initially I intended to document Gamergu culture as one of the surviving aboriginal groups of the region that predates Kanuri, especially since some of the population survived through retreat. But knowing that much of what remained of the Gamergu culture has been heavily influenced by the Kanuri culture, alternatively I was left with the choice of perceiving the Gamergu as an ethnic group that existed as a frontier society or on the borderline of a powerful and dominant Kanuri empire.

Similarly, the work will focus on the freedom offered by the 20th Century to the Gamergu population that survived through retreat and accommodation of the Kanuri culture. It is difficult to say how far the Gamergu have gone in revamping their traditions but certainly some similar groups in the area are doing so through formation of associations and elite caucus groups to fight for their cause. They realized that their culture was fading away in the 20th Century given the various means through which modernisation was gaining ground and leading to change among the people. Early travellers to the region such as Barth and Nachtigal in the mid 19th Century predicted the absorption of the Gamergu culture by the Kanuri culture. This understanding was as a result of the political structure put in place by the Kanuri leadership to gain control of the populace irrespective of their ethnic or religious background. In describing the situation Cohen (1970,152) stated that the fief system was used as the mode of incorporating isolated settlements, ethnic groups, or nomadic pastoralists which developed within the borders of the Borno Empire that served to link such peoples to the State hierarchy. The stem of the system therefore ran from the local settlements to a Kanuri noble through a local representative (*chima gana*). The local settlements could either be Kanuri in the majority or minority which then absorbed the developing national culture of the Kanuri and in this sense became part of an expanding Kanuri ethnic unit. According to Cohen differences of dialect, hairstyle, local architecture, perhaps even specialised set occupations, might persist or even develop, but for purposes of membership in a polity these territorially defined fiefs were subparts of the kingdom. However, the incorporation of non-Kanuri groups such as Gamergu has brought them into Kanuri

socio-political structure at the level of ecology and village organization but within the family there are still non-Kanuri practices. Some of their practices indicate that they are still regarded, to some extent, by their Kanuri neighbours as pagans and members of an inferior minority group even though they profess Islam.

CHAPTER THREE

FORMATION OF ANCIENT GAMERGU POLITY

HISTORICAL ORIGIN OF THE GAMERGU

Introduction

One thing that the Gamergu seem to be holding with regard to their origin is their belief that they came from the East³. This view notwithstanding they also relate their background to specific locations within the areas of their habitat. Available archaeological evidence of the nature of settlement in the region will also be examined with a view to finding out any possible connections that exist with the Gamergu. The chapter will therefore, summarize the various legends of the Gamergu oral traditions regarding their historical origin and the information from archaeological evidence so that we could be able to gain a sound background of one of the many ethnic groups in the region. This chapter will further delve into the settlement patterns of the Gamergu people making reference to their early historical settlements. Since the nature of Gamergu communities is based on clusters of hamlets, the chapter will also identify and discuss the position of those settlements that formed part of their history and demographic concentration. The historical formation of ancient Gamergu society as an independent group within the region, as well as clan distribution among its communities, will form part of this chapter. The Gamergu are regarded as an aboriginal group of the region whose religion and culture precedes both that of Kanuri and Islamic cultures. Consequently Kanuri people regarded ethnic groups that pre-existed in the area as *kirdi*⁴. In view of this perception we will look at the organization of the Gamergu belief system as described by the people.

Oral Traditions

The Coming of a Stranger

It is important to mention that historical legends of most ethnic groups in the Lake Chad basin seem to emphasize a similar origin of their journey as coming from the

³ A view held by many traditions living in the Lake Chad region and much of Central Nigeria.

⁴ This is a term widely used in the region, particularly by Kanuri and Fulbe to refer to pagan or non-Muslim people.

East. The Gamergu in this regard share almost the same historical legend with their Mandara brethren.

One of the legends narrated by Galla (2003) mentioned that Malgwa had two sons called Kewe and Wandala. One Bukar Aisami came from the east to Ishga Malgwa (later renamed it Ishga Kewe) and married the daughter of Malgwa. They gave birth to Faya (Vaya). Malgwa became the head of the community but when he died there was a dispute as to whom between Wandala (Malgwa's son) and Faya (his grandson) would inherit his position as the leader of the community. When Faya succeeded Wandala was forced to flee to Ishga Karde. Faya remained at Ishga Malgwa and renamed it as Ishga Kewe, which then grew to a large town and became a commercial centre with Thursdays as its market days. Faya had two daughters named Katale and Dafla. Dafla then had a son called Ajimakiya who later became a strong and powerful leader of Ishga Kewe. Sugda succeeded her father Ajimakiya. At her time she visited Kerawa (regarded as the centre of the Mandara people) where she brought their leader Agakuma Jada under her authority. Sugda fell in love with a stranger that was found in her land and married him. She gave him the throne of leadership, which also coincided with considerable increase in the Gamergu and Wandala population. Ishga Kewe then became the new Headquarters of united Gamergu and Wandala populations. According to Ummate (Dogumba, 1995) the tradition states that the areas extending from Uje Maiduguri to Lake Alau and up to Wazza in the East were dominated by the Malgwa.

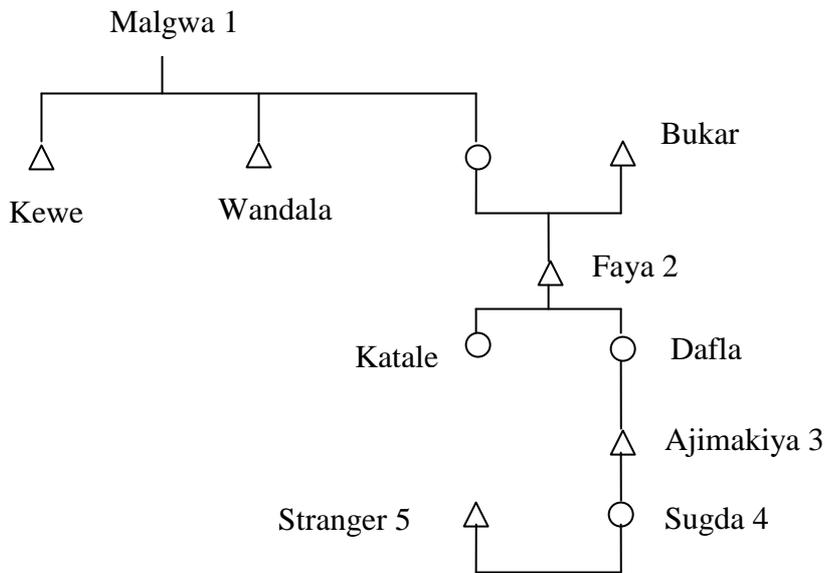


Figure 1: Diagram of kin relations

Another version of the legend narrated by Baram (1996) states that four princes, Umma, Muso, Galtima and Matta left Yemen on their horses as a result of revolt from jihad at the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) in Mecca. They escaped from the war by disguising themselves as hunters, having traded their horses for bows and arrows. They arrived in the present Mandaraland at the time of queen Sugda who succeeded her husband after his death. When they were sighted hunting in the forest the queen was informed of the presence of the strangers in her land. She ordered her men to bring them in order to explain their reason for coming to her land. Three of them were found and brought before her but she ordered them to find the fourth person. When he was brought before her Matta sat on the throne beside her. The queen then said that she has found a husband now because she has been living alone for seven years since she lost her husband. She instructed her men to take him inside the palace and wash him in preparation for their marriage. She stepped aside for him to take the throne and she assumed her usual role as wife. The other three left Mandaraland and established themselves at different places. Muso found a village and named it Mofio where he became the Mai. Galtima (Galadima) went to the land of Manga people and became the Galtima (Galadima) of Nguru. Umma on the other

hand headed north and found a village near a hunter's camp called Lauwa. He later renamed the place as Gawa and became the Mai.

The North – South Migration

One of the traditions states that the area south-east of the Lake Chad was originally occupied by the Gamergu before the invasion of the Kanuri from Kanem (Gege, 1993). The area between Gashua and Lake Chad along the Komadugu Yobe was one of the fortified settlements of the Gamergu. The Gamergu moved further south and south-east after they were raided by the Kanuri. The Gamergu tradition further states that Malgwa and Kewe, of *nija* clan, resulted in the emergence of the Wandala (Mandara) people. They were the first ancestors of the Wandala people that ruled the Mandara dynasty. Among the largest villages of the Malgwa people at that time were Ishga Kewe, Amsaka, Sra Warda (Cameroon), and Kerawa. The dominance of Kerawa over the other villages gave strength to the Wandala people. The group united and accepted a common leader called the *thlikse* (owner of) of the land. The different village chiefs then became united under the centralised chiefdom with Kerawa as the Headquarters of Mandaraland.

The Aborigines (*Ngawarwu*)

This legend assigns the origin of the Gamergu to Muna. This version seems to support the name given to the Gamergu by the Kanuri in place of their traditional name called Malgwa. The name Gamergu is a version of the Kanuri word Ngawarwu – meaning the original inhabitants (aborigines). Their leader at Muna was called Dajama Dankallama Kaama. They however, resettled around the River Yedseram and founded Dogumba as their new principal village.

The Wandala (Mandara) were a ruling caste over the Gamergu. The Wandala must have arrived in the region much later than the Gamergu people with their own language but earlier than the Kanuri as observed by Barkindo (1989, 89). They exerted control over the indigenous Gamergu, who were perhaps not politically centralized. The language spoken by the Wandala people must have been blended with that of the local Gamergu thereby giving birth to the present language of the Wandala, which is clearly a dialect of the Gamergu language. This theory is similar to what happened with the arrival of the Kanuri in Borno. The coming of the ruling

family of Sayfawa enabled the Kanembu language to blend with those of the indigenous languages hence resulting in the present Kanuri language. Many of the indigenous languages have since become dialects of the Kanuri language such as Mowar, Manga, Koyam, etc. The Wandala seems to have been politically more organized than the Gamergu and thereby exerted their authority over the Gamergu with hardly any resistance. The co-existence and fusion of the Wandala and the Gamergu even extended further to their cultural traditions. They shared the same religious belief and clan distribution at the time they were living together. Perhaps this form of fusion could be a complementary one where the Wandala, being more politically organised, took control of the leadership and the Gamergu having taken charge of the spiritual aspect. The Wandala later became fully Islamized. This is further asserted by the Gamergu traditions that recognized the Wandala ruler – *Thlikse* as a spiritual leader. According to Barkindo (1989, 109) the *Thlikse* was not only recognized for his military might alone but also for economic and cultural reasons. Even though the Wandala have moved further south where they formed the Wandala Sultanate the Gamergu and some neighbouring peoples continued to identify with the *Thlikse* as a sacred king.

Barkindo states:

Most of the well-known centres of worship had been brought under the Tlikse's control: Ishga-Kewe, the stone cult of Kerawa, the Kingiro Lake, and with the conquest of the area the rain shrine of that mountain also (Barkindo, 1989, 109)

However, with the arrival of the Sayfawa ruling family to the region and their subsequent pressure on the indigenous populations the Wandala people were then forced to retreat southward into the more inaccessible plains of the Mandara Mountains where they formed a stronger political authority. Barkindo writes:

...that certain attempts at centralization appear to have pre-dated the final arrival of the people of Kanem in Borno at the end of the 14th Century, when it is quite clear that the coming of the Sayfawa accelerated the process of the state formation (Barkindo, 1989, 89).

The account of oral traditions on the origin of the Gamergu may have been a corrupt version of the legend of the Wandala people. Since the Wandala⁵ were a ruling group over the Gamergu then the account of the legend of the Wandala could be clearly seen as the correct version and that the Gamergu were met at the region by the Wandala who then took over the leadership of the people. This account of Gamergu and Wandala fusion supports the theory of political centralization (Cohen 1978a; Haas 1982; Service 1975, 1978) where the Gamergu could be said to have willingly submitted to Wandala leadership because of the benefit it could provide. In this case the Wandala could be seen to have provided both spiritual and political leadership over the Gamergu population.

Even though the Gamergu hold the notion that their origin is linked to the east they also relate their historical foundation of some individual villages to their origin. These villages are of historical importance to the people and are major settlements that played roles in the region. The Gamergu do not have any form of central government but instead individual villages played important role in the religious and cultural practices of the people. The demographic movement from north to south as a result of search for greener pasture (Smith, 1967) and the transfer of the capital of the Borno Empire from Kukawa to Maiduguri brought the Kanuri people closer to Gamergu settlements. This resulted in taking administrative control of now acephalous Gamergu settlements that are located within the vicinity of the new capital of Maiduguri by the Kanuri leadership and subsequent assimilation of its population. Nevertheless some of the major Gamergu settlements away from this area remained strongholds of the Gamergu and continued to exercise resistance: these include Ishga Kewe, Dogumba, Boboshe and Iza Garu.

Archaeological Evidence

Connah's (1976) discoveries at Maidbe which is located about 60km east of Bama show the existence of a ruined town. The location of the site is in the sandy country of Gamergu, probably dating from the latter part of the 15th century, and which Connah thinks may have been abandoned in the 18th century. According to Barkindo (1989) the town appeared to have been big and surrounded by a wall and a ditch. The

⁵ Barkindo refer to the Wandala as a ruling caste over the Gamergu.

archaeological materials discovered on the surface of the wall suggest that the town was built on a more ancient settlement. The people who occupied the site worked in iron, which was used for both tools and decoration. They were also possibly farmers, since fragments of grindstones and pieces of stone grinders were found.

Excavation in another location at Daima (also located at the very edge of the eastern side of the Gamergu country) according to Connah provided an interesting picture of changing material culture over a substantial period of time. The use of bone as a raw material for tools and weapons was largely confined to the earlier part of the mound's history and died out at the appearance of iron (Connah, 1976, 334). All the stones used, particularly for making grinder/pounders and grindstones, were brought from outside, perhaps from Mandara. A substantial part of the stone assemblage at Daima appears to have been intended for grinding of plant foods, either wild or cultivated.

The examination of bones on the site suggests a predominantly pastoral economy that had given way to a predominantly cereal-cultivating one. Further examination of the remains from Daima indicates that domestic cattle were the dominant species. According to Connah, (1976, 338) the material culture of clay figurines show representations of animals, such as cow, sheep or goats, some of them wild and human beings. Other items of interest discovered include spindle whorls, smoking pipes, balls beads, ear/nose/lip ornaments, bracelets, headrests, and toy pots all made of clay.

Evidence regarding iron consists both of objects of the metal and of slag, evidently carried out at the site. Evidence of bronze work was also identified and was in the form of grave goods. Seventy burials excavated further indicated the use of glass, carnelian and quartz beads, stone lip plugs and cowry shells which suggest that the later occupants of Daima had widespread trading connections. Radiocarbon dates of Daima suggest that an occupation of some 1700 years duration; and there is no evidence to suggest that it does not represent continuous occupation although settlement may well have been seasonal or periodic (Connah, 1976).

Although archaeological excavation has provided us with some information about the existence of more organized and concentrated communities with some level of industrialization it has, however, left us without any direct link to the Gamergu or other people occupying the region in present times and their pattern of political organization. Certainly the period before the insurgence of the Zaghawa tribes from eastern side of the Lake Chad to the western side has the Gamergu population covering areas from the present-day Maiduguri town up to the Kamadugu Yobe valley. In between these areas are, of course, the Sao populations located in two key areas of Borno: the Sao Talala are to the south-eastern shores of the Lake Chad around Logone area and the Sao Ngafata to the south-west of Lake Chad in the Yobe Valley region (Palmer, 1970, 13, 20). The Gamergu population then was concentrated in the areas from Ishga Kewe towards the north up to the Yobe valley where they share boundary with the Sao Ngafata. At that time the Wandala (Mandara) people were co-habiting with the Gamergu but the *Thlikse* (chief of the land) was held by the Wandala. Both according to Wandala and Gamergu traditions, the political administration of the communities rested with the Wandala group. However, the aggression of Borno leaders, after consolidation of their capital in Gazargamo, at the end of the 15th century then focused on the earlier inhabitants of Borno which made the Wandala people to move southward. It was then that the Wandala founded their new capital of Kerawa located at the foot of the Mandara Mountains (see Map 2) thereby being separated from their Gamergu brethren. The Wandala political head consequently moved to Kerawa leaving the Gamergu without a centralized government and *Thlikse*. It was in this situation of a stateless status that the Gamergu suffered most of the Kanuri insurgence leading them to live in scattered settlements. The period up to the El-Kanemi era in the late 19th century saw the gradual movement of the Gamergu population to the southern frontier with the expansion of the Kanuri Empire towards the same direction. The Gamergu occupy the entire area of present day Maiduguri Metropolitan and the stretch along the river Yedseram during the El-Kanemi period in Kukawa (see map 1). Both Barth (1857) and Nachtigal (1980) clearly mapped the region as the “Province of the Gamergu”. When Kukawa was destroyed by Rabeah in 1893 he founded his capital at Dikwa. Dikwa’s proximity to the areas of Gamergu settlements did not change matters much for them since Rabeah specifically attacked Kanuri settlements. It was then that many Kanuri people fled from their areas thereby allowing the Gamergu and other non-

Kanuri groups loyal to Rabeh's administration to settle in the area. However, when the Kanuri leadership came back to power seven years later the capital of Borno was then relocated to Maiduguri, which was one of the main Gamergu settlements. With this development Gamergu population was further forced to move southward into some remote areas. Hence the population concentrated at the periphery of the empire.

When Kanuri pressure on the Gamergu population to convert to Islam reached its climax during the El-Kanemi period most of the Gamergu people were then forced to regroup in their respective spiritual centres where representatives of the Chief Priest resided. This, according to the people (Gege, 1995, Grema, Modu and Muge, 2001, Galla, 2003), was to seek spiritual protection from their spiritual leaders against the insurgence. The situation, therefore, brought about concentrated settlements occupied by Gamergu people at the southern frontier of Kanuri Empire (see map 4 below). It is these settlements, as we will come to see in the following chapter, which the Kanuri leadership took advantage of by making them part of its political organization with their local heads appointed from amongst Kanuri people.

POPULATION AND PATTERN OF GAMERGU FRONTIERS

It is important to know the Gamergu political system and its community distribution prior to present time as a frontier polity. They are a large group (numbering about 30,000 {Löhr, 2002}) in the region that have occupied a significant area of land, even though there is no dispute, regarding the presence of the Gamergu, in areas occupied by the present-day Kanuri population in the region. Even though archaeological evidence has shown the existence of earlier settlements in the Gamergu occupied areas there is no conclusion as to whether they were inhabited by the Gamergu people.

The early pattern of settlements of the Gamergu people seems to be in scattered communities where villages were situated far from each other. Some major Gamergu settlements such as Muna, Alau and Uje were located in the vicinity of the present Maiduguri Metropolitan where the city itself (Maiduguri Metropolitan) and the capital of Borno State developed from Gamergu urban centres (see map 1 & 2). However, with the movement of the population further south because of Kanuri

pressure, the settlements of the Gamergu concentrated mainly along the River Yedseram. The river, which stretches between Bama and Dikwa, has on its shores a great many Gamergu villages, such as Dogumba, Sugabaja, Boboshe, Mowa, Dabula and Ngarno. Another area of Gamergu population centres is in the region west of Bama and Konduga (see map 2). Gamergu settlements in the area include Ishga Kewe and Angwala. Similarly, the villages of Iza Garu, Mbulya and Jebra are areas of Gamergu concentration located south of Bama. Then a small population of Gamergu settlements exist east of Dar-el-Jamal, which also links up to the settlements along the shores of River Yedseram. Gamergu settlements could also be found as far as within the triangle of Bama – Damboa – Gwoza, co-habiting with the local population in the respective areas such as Marghi, Kilba, Chibok, etc.

Gamergu settlements can today be classified into three categories because of the pattern of their distribution. There are certain Gamergu settlements that can be categorised as remote centres because of their few occupants rather than their inaccessibility. Such settlements contain between 5-10 households, which are insignificant for non-Gamergu migrants to settle there. Hence such places could be said to maintain pure Gamergu population. The perception is that people usually migrate to places with social amenities and urban-like commercial centres. Nonetheless certain migrants do stay in some remote villages in order to farm in the area. In fact most of the remote villages of the Gamergu resulted from farming camps that were founded by farmers and in some instances migrants also joined in their habitation. A number of such villages are distributed in different places where Gamergu population existed. Among such villages are those between Mafa and Yale (Konduga L.G.) namely Munyari and Matagujari. Many of the villages are located between Bama and Dikwa where concentration of the Gamergu population is higher. Among the villages that have in the range of 10 households and above include Manawaji, Baldama, Shigal Gogo, Dole, Kwakwa, Tabidige, Barya and Zula. These remote villages do not have markets but travel to other villages in their vicinity that have markets.

However another category of Gamergu settlements is that with large populations that are known to be identified with higher concentrations of Gamergu people. Most of the villages that have Gamergu concentration are also the old settlements that are

linked to their origin and migration pattern. The villages that are today being considered among the most Gamergu populated areas include Dogumba (Dakamba), Jolo, Mowa, Murfari, Dubula, Boboshe (Babashe) and Sugabaja (Sabaja) with each having over 50 households. Other settlements in the same category but at different locations are Iza located southwest of Bama, Awulari and Ishga Kewe between Bama and Konduga. These villages and those of the remote areas are inhabited by the Gamergu people that also communicate in their language. However, those villages that have over 50 households also have migrants in their midst such as Kanuri, Hausa, Shuwa Arabs and nationals of neighbouring countries, especially those of Cameroon and Chad that come to the area for fishing or farming. Some of these villages also have markets that take place once in a week where people from other nearby villages attend. Some of the market centres include Dogumba, Mowa and Mbuliya whereas those villages close to Kanuri market centres make use of the proximity to attend such markets. Kanuri market centres include those of Bama, Kawuri, Konduga, Dikwa, Yale, Mafa, Pulka and Kerawa. Within this category of Gamergu settlements are those considered to be of spiritual importance where certain rituals are performed. These villages have representatives of the chief priest who delegates the overseeing of rituals in the areas. Hence some villages may not have market centres but could be said to be of importance in religious activities, such as Iza, and Ishga Kewe.

The third category of Gamergu settlements are those originally occupied by the Gamergu but which are today completely assimilated into Kanuri culture. These villages have Gamergu in the minority and in some places with hardly any Gamergu left. Hence such villages are identified as either Kanuri or Shuwa Arab. Some of the villages assimilated over two generations ago whereas in other cases it is just one generation that is in the process of complete acculturation. Among those assimilated villages that today identify with the Kanuri people are Gawa, Muna, Kasugula and Alau. The Maiduguri metropolitan area of today used to be separate settlements of the Gamergu of Muna, Uje and Mabani. Some of the Kanurized settlements are further discussed in Chapter Four.

Ancient Gamergu Settlements

This category of villages is populated by Gamergu people and therefore, could be said to identify with Gamergu-ness. It is in such villages that “pure” Gamergu material culture could be found in use, for example, objects such as pots, clay granary, wooden bowls, etc form part of woman’s room decoration. Similarly the pattern of settlement, ritual ceremonies, farming activities and other forms of cultural activity of Gamergu could be said to be maintained and practised such as *siyire* (celebration after death), *kyarva* (child and adult initiations) and the oath taking ritual.

Ishga Kewe

The founder of Ishga Kewe clans, which is considered to be the birth place of both the Gamergu and the Mandara peoples (Barkindo, 1989, 35), was Me Dugje. Five clans that are linked to Dugje are *mda katche*, *mda ali*, *mda gwala*, *mda hyeuzare* and *mda nema*. Out of these clans *mda katche* is further divided into two, namely *mda megwe* and *mda iga sɔ ga*. Male children of women from *katche* clan were then allowed to settle on their own which resulted in the subgroups. For example, *mda megwe* clan came from Nakwada Megwe, Yaga Yaga Bire and Kawa Megwe. *Mda hyeuzare* is also divided into *mda aga nagira* and *mda galdtha*. The origin of *mda nema* is connected to an abandoned boy in the bush who was adopted by the head of the community in Ishga Kewe and was said to have been breastfed by his senior wife. The head instructed his family to respect the boy as a member of the family. Hence the kindred of the boy are considered as part of the *mda nema* clan. The Head of *mda nema* similarly cautioned his people not to marry his kindred since they belong to the same clan. The clans of *katche*, *ali*, *gwala* and *hyeuzare* will not marry from amongst themselves because they originated from the same ancestor. However, *mda nema* is allowed to marry from any of the four clans because their origin is linked to the abandoned child. Even some members from the four clans consider *mda nema* as being related to them hence respect the belief that marriage should not take place between them (please see chapter six for detailed information on marriage). Ishga Kewe was considered to be a large walled town with four gates. The eastern gate was called *wakalame* which was the gate for welcoming visitors. A special sacrifice takes place by the gate where either goat or chicken is slaughtered to pray

for protection against enemies and disaster. The sacrifice, which is still carried out yearly, takes place when the first ploughing (*hārda*) starts. The sacrifice is conducted by the *mda megwe* clan and the animal is cooked and consumed on the spot. The town of Ishga Kewe was destroyed at the time of Mai Idris Alooma of the Sayfawa Dynasty in the 16th Century but the village was repopulated in the 19th Century after the destruction of Muna (another strong Gamergu town) by the Fulbe.

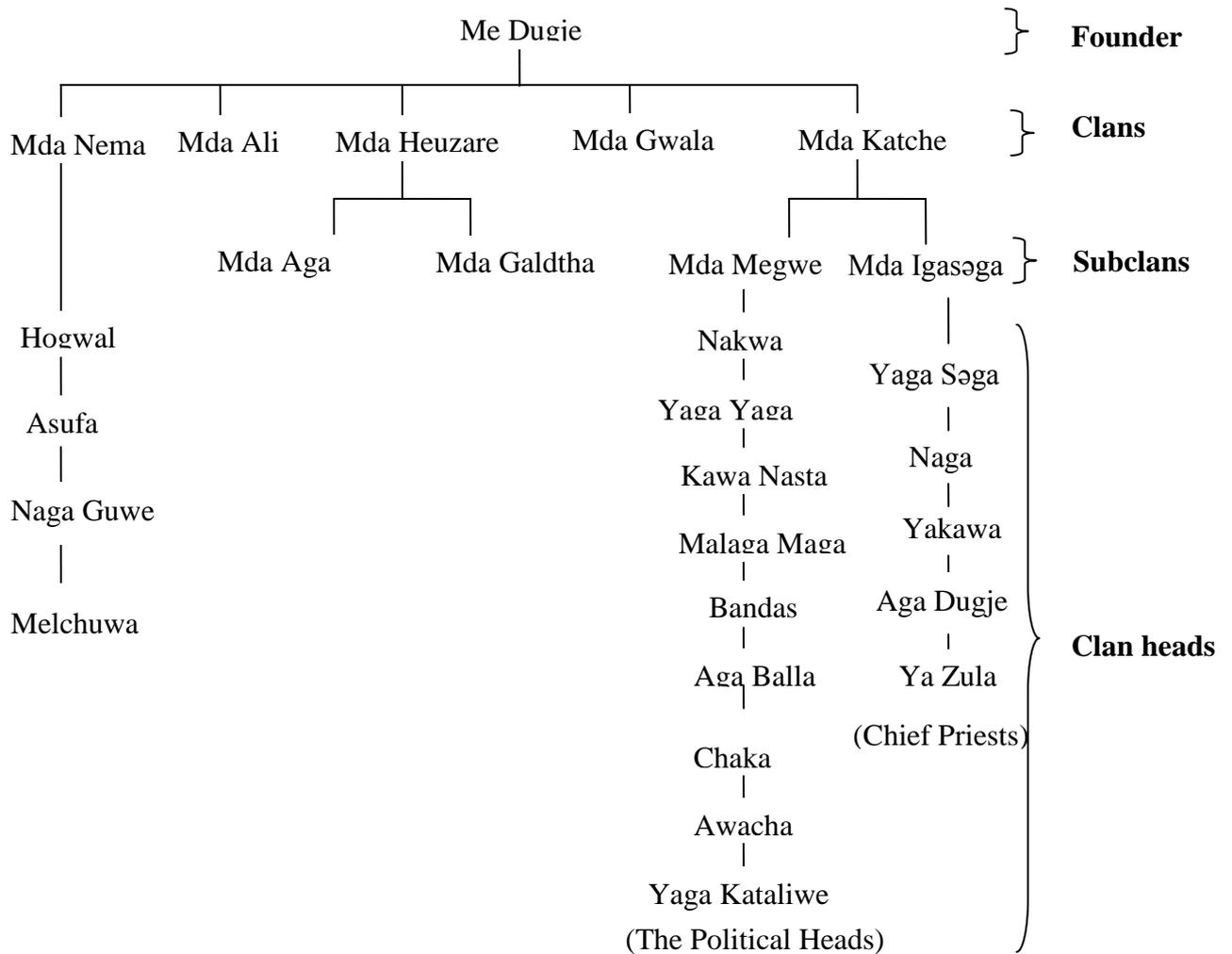


Figure 2: Diagram of the Founder and clans of Ishga Kewe

Dogumba

According to Gamergu tradition, a hunter and his wife founded the Gamergu village of Dogumba (meaning bush). The couple gave birth to twin babies. One of the twins died while the other founded Dogumba. The woman gave birth to another set of twins after which the parents died. One of the younger twins founded Jolo when Dogumba became over-populated. Other villages were subsequently founded as a

result of population growth, expansion of farmlands, grazing area, etc. Among other Gamergu villages in the Yedsaram area include Boboshe, Mowa, Murfari, Shugabaja, Malumri, Dubula, Gashe, Barya, Zula and some villages at Dara Jamal and Kerawa areas. Dogumba became one of the religious centres of the Gamergu, next to Ishga Kewe, which was said to be the origin of both Gamergu and Mandara clans. Today, Dogumba is the largest settlement of the Gamergu and also has the largest market. It is in Mafa Local Government area of Borno State with an elected local council representative. The village still remains a full Gamergu centre with its inhabitants being Gamergu-speakers.

There are 14 clans in the Dogumba region. These are *mda mumlya*, *mda kamba*, *mda gwara*, *mda namerva*, *mda thlagedva*, *mda juwe*, *mda kwatsa*, *mda debela*, *mda yayani*, *mda waikwara*, *mda agasega*, *mda kwene*, *mda valiya* and *mda jagwe*.

Iza Garu

The village was founded by four clans of *mda kerwe*, *mda hyiula*, *mda gyabe* and *mda nakwale*. The first three clans agreed to find a befitting place for them to settle but they had to prepare and eat their meals. *Mda kerwe* stayed near a termite hill and together with *mda gyabe* were farmers that specialised in *masakwa* (the red variety of sorghum) whereas *mda hyiula* were rope makers. All the clans agreed to cook and eat their meals before they would demarcate their boundaries. However, before the three clans could finish their meals *mda nakwala* who link their origin to Kukawa finished their meal quicker because they had ground millet which they prepared and ate. Hence *mda nakwala* hurriedly demarcated their settlement at the new site of Iza Garu and claimed most of the land before the others. By the time the other three clans came to the site it was largely demarcated by the *mda nakwala*. When the other clans tried to get certain area to settle they found that most part of the site were pegged. The *mda nakwala* said *kwalle kwalle*” in Kanuri (leave it, leave it). The other three got a small area and also settled together with the *mda nakwala* clan. More clans then came to the area and settled with them, among which are *nasærdake*, *mda bala* and *wadaka*. The clan of *nasærdake* was said to have originated from two brothers called *Asærdake gwala* and *Bala gwala*. They were warriors and originally from the village of Vale near Kerawa but were chased away by other tribes. Their enemies who spread poisonous thorns that killed a lot of their people made them flee from the

area. The people could not cope with the condition and had to leave their settlements and come to Iza Garu. The other clans emerge from the five clans that first settled in the area. The village expanded over the years and was walled with five entrance gates. The *nakwala* clan had their gate in the north while *kerwe* had theirs on the west. The eastern gate belongs to *nasərdake* whereas *wadake* and *bala* shared the southern gate. Today it is said that the following clans exist in Iza, namely *mda kerwe*, *mda nakwale*, *mda nasərdake*, *mda bala*, *mda wadake*, *mda esəkwathla*, *mda juwe*, *mda vuliya*, *mda balo*, *mda wurme*, *mda naza*, *mda gude*, *Mda hyiula*, *mda gyabe* and *mda ugdəshe*.

Aga Zirwe was the leader of Iza Garu and was very loyal to the king (*Thlikse*) of Mandara at Mura. Taxes collected in the area were remitted to the king at Mura. Aga Zirwe was from *nakwala* clan. In recent time the political leadership was changed by the Kanuri leadership to Lawan (village head) and was vested on Kapsur from *viliya* clan. The Lawan is answerable to the Emir of Dikwa Emirate based in Bama. Iza continued to remain as a typical Gamergu village with its head from the Gamergu clans. The head is answerable to the District Head and the Emir in Bama in the present political set up. The village head resides in Iza but has another residence in Mbuliya, the market village of the area along the Bama-Gwoza Highway.

Gawa

The village of Gawa was one of the major concentrations of the Gamergu population and is regarded as one of their ancient settlements. It is one of the centres that featured in the legends of both the Gamergu and Mandara people. Barth described the village based on information he collected during his visit to Dikwa:

About two hours south by the west of Dikwa is another walled town called Gawa, but this town still at present day is inhabited by the ancient population of the country, viz the Gamergu and is residence of a petty native chief, Bulama Sara, while another petty chief of the Gamergu has his residence in Kakamba⁶ (Barth, 1854, 129).

⁶ Kakamba here refers to Dakamba according to the Gamergu but in modern times it is written as Dogumba.

This description of Gawa by Barth shows how the settlement commanded authority of the Gamergu population as a strong hold of the people. Gawa's location in close proximity to Dogumba, a principal town of the Gamergu indicates its influence on the population. The Gamergu accorded Gawa and its chief a high regard and it seems once to have been an independent chiefdom in the region comparable to those pre-Sayfawa chiefdoms such as Ngala, Ndufu, Marte, etc. During the Sayfawa rule the village was regarded as one of the main sources of conflicts between the Kanuri and the Gamergu. The chiefs of Gawa refused to submit to the leadership of the Sayfawa in order to maintain their religious independence and cultural identity. The Mai of Gawa was said to have possessed great powers that could equal that of the sacred trees as Patterson elaborated,

In earlier times when Mai Gawama⁷ went to war, he took his sword out of its niche in the wall of his house which it never left at any other time. The effect of it on his opponents was the same as the sacred object had on the men of his tribes. To fill with awe and deprived them of all desire to fight (Patterson, NAK, 1921, 70).

However, as we will come to see in Chapter Four Gawa was completely turned into a Kanuri village during the reign of El-Kanemi.

Muna

The town of Muna was regarded as one of the areas of Gamergu origin as supported by a Gamergu legend. Barth mentioned Muna as once a town of great importance but destroyed by the Fulbe during their incursion into Borno. Seidensticker (1983, 6) also states:

In previous centuries rather a peripheral area was inhabited by Gamergu who had their capital or major town in Muna, approximately 10 km north-east of Maiduguri.

However, in the early twentieth century, due to Kanuri attacks against the Gamergu, Muna became the most notorious centre of criminal activities. Because of the

⁷ This refers to the ruler of Gawa.

markets in Uje and Mabani merchants returning to their settlements were targeted by disgruntled Gamergu robbers who also used Gamergu settlements in the vicinity such as Alau and Muna as their hideout. The village became the centre where booties acquired by Gamergu criminals were shared. It was an area where most people dared not pass through in the early 20th century because of highway robbery.

Kajeri

Kajeri is in modern times, a typical Gamergu remote settlement located along the River Yedseram. It was among the first settlements where a Gamergu was appointed as Lawan to head a village. Upon assumption of duties Lawan Baram identified with Islam (the principal religion of the Kanuri political leadership) and dissociated his community from non-Islamic practice. According to the village head, his followers were compelled to accept Islam before his appointment. It was then that he proclaimed, on behalf of the people in his area, that they repented their pagan activities, among which is the famous celebration of the dead (*lakiwa*). The dead body is laid on the ground and the people dance and sing around it with their spears pointing to the sky, claiming to fight the Creator for taking the life of one of them. This type of Gamergu tradition is perceived by the Kanuri as anti-Islamic. The Gamergu people in the community that were loyal to the Kanuri leadership met with some representatives of the Shehu from Maiduguri where they decided to warn their members to desist from their pagan activities. They authorised the community leaders, in the 1950s to fine any person that violates the proclamation with 1000 shillings or spend a jail term of 7 years. Both the Shehu and the district head were informed of their decision.

Boboshe

According to oral tradition the village of Boboshe was the settlement of the Gamergu ancestor's grandparents. The grandparents adopted their grandchildren and raised them up in the village. One Bula Yazila considered being the founder of Boboshe was brought to the place by his grandparents. He became the founder of modern Boboshe and Ishga Kewe.

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE AND SOCIAL HIERARCHY

Gamergu social organisation is entangled with their religious practice, which is focused on ancestor worship. Consequently the administration of the society is in the hands of the religious leaders who are answerable to the ancestors. The societal norms and values as well as their means of survival are all regulated by religious belief. Since one cannot isolate social organisation from religious practice it is then imperative to portray the nature of their belief in order to also understand their social and political life. Description of the religious practice and social organisation will then give the basis to compare Gamergu with other neighbouring ethnic groups in terms of their modern political upheaval and quest for survival given the diversified nature of today's society.

Religious Practice and Cosmology

The main reason for a Gamergu person not to have public recognition or office in the Kanuri dominated State is his belief and association with paganism. This issue has for many decades tarnished their image among the Kanuri of Borno. This has resulted in repeated campaigns and threats on the Gamergu to adopt Islam as their religion. Many Gamergu people converted to Islam by the end of the 20th Century and subsequently changed their identity in favour of Kanuri identity. However, a reasonable population of the Gamergu stick to their traditional beliefs while mixing up with those of Islamic practice.

The Gamergu and their brethren Mandara (Wandala) belief is centred around a spiritual tree called *muwayir*⁸ (*Kigelia aethiopica*), which is found in most Gamergu settlements (Barkindo 1989, 36). The belief associated with the tree (see fig. 3 below), is said to have originated in the account that a Gamergu prince⁹ disappeared into the trunk of the tree. Their belief that is centred around the spiritual tree has also influence the political organisation of the people. The original tree that the prince

⁸ Barkindo mentioned the name of the sacred tree as *muwayir* but according to my informants *thluliya* is also referred to the tree. The Chief Priest is called *Dada Thluliya* as is correctly mentioned by Barkindo (*Dodaliya*) which means 'father of the tree'. Hence I will use the term *Thluliya* to refer to the tree and similarly *Dada Thluliya* to refer to the Chief Priest.

⁹ There is a contradiction between the Gamergu and Mandara version of this tradition where both refer to the prince's identity as either being Gamergu or Mandara. Because both groups were living together at certain time their traditions of origin are similar, if not the same. But there is a background issue as to whether they were the same ethnic group before being separated by geographical location.

disappeared into was located in Ishga Kewe: the settlement that annually brings together the Gamergu community from far and near and serves as a symbol for dispensing justice. The belief therefore, centres on the power of their ancestors, who are perceived as the protectors and providers of their needs in the world. Hence ancestor worship prevails in Gamergu communities even though such practice is centred on the sacred tree through which the ancestors communicate with the people. The Gamergu family or individual does not have any symbolic representation of the ancestors in their compounds as in the case of the Mafa, for example, who keep representatives of their different gods/goddesses (*Jigile*) with human form made into pottery. Gamergu ancestor worship is presided over by the priest who has direct contact with the gods and transmits to the people. The sacred tree is under the supervision of the leader of the clans that is vested with the responsibility and regarded as the chief priest (*dada thluliya*). He conducts sacrifice to the tree in order to appease the ancestors who are expected to protect them. The chief priest translates his conversation with the ancestors in the form of information whenever a ceremony is performed at the sacred tree. All ritual performance carried out by the Gamergu form part of their belief system and culminates in oath taking and sacrifices to the ancestors.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 3: Women making preparation for *Həle* under the *Thluliya* sacred tree

The Chief Priest is represented by a number of lesser priests in each village called *male*. The *male* is charged with the responsibility of overseeing and conducting all the ritual ceremonies in his vicinity on behalf of the Chief Priest. The village head is in charge of the political administration of the village whereas the *male* heads the Elders' Committee. The head of the Gamerguland at the time they were together with the Mandara people was the *Thlikse* but his position is no longer in place in modern Gamergu society who are being administered according to Kanuri political structure.

The ritual ceremony was later moved to Dogumba when Ishga Kewe was deserted around the 16th Century when Mai Idris Aloom (one of the Sayfawa kings) destroyed several Gamergu settlements. The occasion was used for dispensing justice, which involved swearing on the spiritual tree that is believed to have the power of punishing the wrong-doer. Sacrifice was made during the (*həle*) ceremony to appease the ancestors and for families and individuals to pray for their needs for the year. One of the main attractions of the celebration at Dogumba is the appearance of a spiritual snake, which is considered harmless. Any kind of insect or animal that

may appear from the tree is believed to be harmless. But on the contrary the appearance of a hyena in the night of the celebration is a sign of bad luck for the year. The occasion brings together all Gamergu communities from far and near to Dogumba. Each person contributes according to his/her ability in the form of money or animals such as goats, chickens, cows, etc. that will be used for the ceremony. Contributions are collected at the family levels before coming to the site of the ceremony. The occasion was festive with dancing, beer drinking and fighting (Barkindo 1989, 36).

However, within the belief system of the Gamergu there are also two important rituals performed in the same way by the sacred tree whenever necessary. The rituals are referred to as *həle* and *zawada*.

Həle

Həle is the ritual performed at the beginning of each farming season called *madare*. *Madare* is the beginning of the rainy season when rain-fed agriculture is carried out. In order to usher in a good harvesting season *həle* is conducted in each community under the supervision of the *male* (Hagwala, 2002). Even though this is a ritual for prosperous farming season the manner in which it is performed requires cleansing of the individual members of the community. Each clan and household is represented during the ritual but those individuals suspected of misconduct in the community must appear in person to clear themselves of any allegations. Hence *həle* is regarded as an opportunity for individuals and groups in the communities to forgive (*ghya*) each other that they had offended during the year. The ritual is conducted under the sacred tree being supervised by the head. Each person accused of bad conduct such as witchcraft, murder, etc. must take oath (*wada*) under the tree in the presence of the community in order to cleanse (*bara*) himself. It is believed that the cleansing of the community members will bring about a productive harvest for the farming season. It is unproductive to venture into farming each year when any members of the community are spiritually impure. When the individuals are not cleansed then the harvest for the year will become unproductive and the ancestors will curse the community (*thlafa*), which will then result in some form of epidemic. It is believed that since the ancestors are buried in the ground they must bless any productive farming.

Zawada

Zawada on the other hand, is a ritual performed purely for oath taking in order to cleanse oneself. As the community prospers there is the likelihood of some individuals breaking (*nda*) the norms of the community or causing hardship to others. Such individuals will be required to take oath on the sacred tree in order to avert such incidents. The ritual is also conducted by the head who, is in charge of the sacred tree. In order to carry out the ritual the accused person (*fa hyima*) must finance the things required for the conduct of the ritual and the presentation made to the ancestors. The *male* will then utter the nature of the offence or allegation to the ancestors. The ancestors will then determine the innocence or otherwise of the accused. However, when a person is accused he is expected to swear by the tree in order to stop the bad conduct. If the person then repeats his bad conduct or is accused of any crime then any of the following catastrophes will happen to him. 1) He may die, 2) become disabled or 3) contract an incurable disease (*dəre*) that may eventually lead to death. Such a person will be under close watch by the community in order to assess any progress post-oath taking. If nothing happens to the person after one year then he is cleared of any accusation and hence becomes a normal member of the community.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 4: Women pounding millet in preparation for the *Həle* ceremony

However, with the Kanuri influence, especially through Islamization of the area, the festival is no longer practiced in unison at the same centre and its scale of festivity is considerably reduced. The gathering is however, conducted in some selected communities attracting villages in their vicinity. The gathering, nevertheless, takes place in some communities under the same type of tree with similar oath taking and feasting. An example of the ceremony I witnessed was led by Yazula Nagadugje, the head of the *mda yagasəga* clan vested with the function of performing the ritual ceremony. Yazula is vested with such power because he is the eldest son from the descendants of the clan and the overall head of the Gamergu clans in Ishga Kewe. He advised the people to desist from doing evil things and not to harm one another. The performance was therefore, to serve as a deterrent or curse on people that harm others. The ritual performance was also the period of cleansing among the people in the community under his supervision. Representatives of the different clans and villages as well as family heads pronounced their loyalty to the ancestors and swore not to harm one another. They also pray for protection of their clans and family from evil deeds. The representatives then take turns one after the other when the opening

performance was conducted by the head of the procession. His recitation in Gamergu is translated as follows:

May God remove from our community any troublemaker. May God also take away any witch that would want to harm our children even if such witch is my son, daughter or wife and destroy her/him. All of you should seriously caution your children and wives against bad habits and evil practices. And anyone of you among us that blames me for such warning will face the blame on him by God. May God, who is our Creator and Sustainer listen to our prayers of goodwill. God our creator, don't listen to the prayers of evil people. If I have any hatred against anybody Gods knows best and whoever wants to ruin my life will be punished by God. I am the only one alive among my father's children in this community. If I have any hatred against any of your children or wives in this village then may God punish me. I always do something right to people and tell the truth to the best of my ability. I don't hate or envy anybody and whoever wants to see me doing bad things then he will not achieve that.

The leader now addresses an accused witch:

Falta Gana, you are drinking the ritual water. Be careful not to attempt doing the witchcraft again or peeping at people like an innocent. Take care of yourself.

Now addresses the Ward Head:

Bulama, I always call on you for advice because you are the head of the community. Therefore you should caution your people do desist from doing bad things such as witchcraft and sorcery.

The Ward Head now take turn to address the people:

Well, if we have bad intentions against anybody at all then may God punish us for our bad intentions. At the same time, if anybody wants to destroy or hate us then may God punish the person with such negative intentions.

Address by representative of *mda nema* clan:

Please listen very well. I am the only person who came from *mda nema* clan to express my view. We are now in a vigilante group assisting in crime reduction. If I have the intention of killing your children just because of my membership of the group then may God take my life first, but anyone

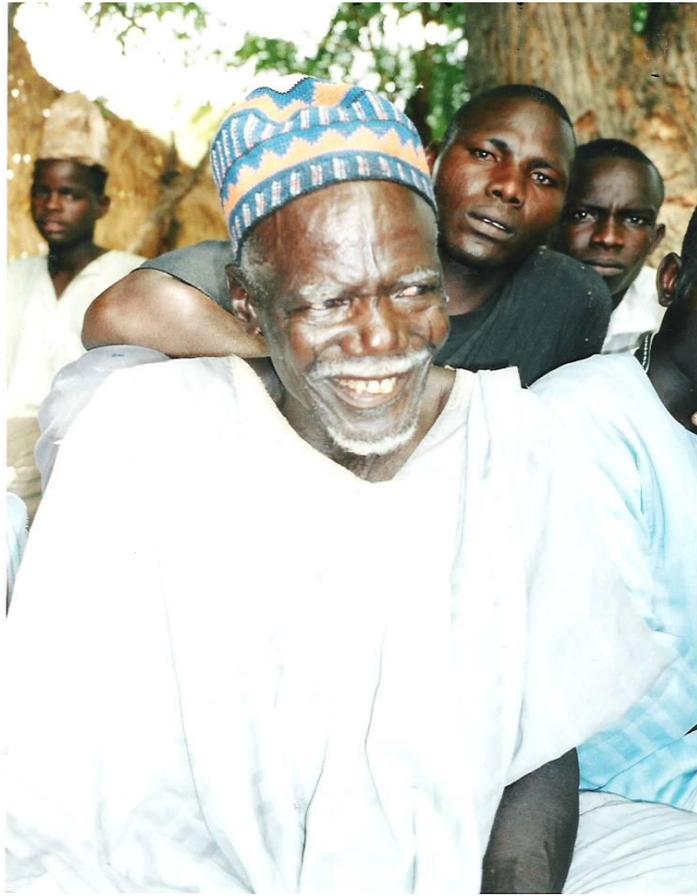
who thinks we are gaining something from the Government and wants to sabotage our effort then may God show him his bad intention.

It is interesting to observe that the people perform their ritual recitations in both Islamic and the traditional beliefs. There is still strong belief in the power of the ancestors among the Gamergu despite the influence of Islam. In addition, the preparing of *bolo* (mixture of millet flour with water and sugar into a solid ball – popular in Kanuri culture) has now replaced the sacrifice of animals and beer drinking (see fig. 5 below). The mixture has also replaced the eating of the leaves from the spiritual tree for curing infertility among women when they drink it. The spiritual leader who also served as the political head of the community has now been reduced to a secondary figure with the introduction of *lawan* (village head) and *bulamas* (ward heads) to head the respective communities. The ceremony is nowadays called *həle*, which could be said to be influenced by the Kanuri word *kəlele* (meaning festival/ceremony).



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 5: Bolo- a mixture of millet flour, water and sugar



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 6: Yazula the Chief Priest (*Dada Thluliya*)

SOCIO-POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The Gamergu did not seem to have had any political or central administration other than their religious affiliation. Many of the early travellers to the area (such as Nachtigal, Barth, etc.) reported that the Gamergu lived in scattered settlements without any central political authority. However, oral traditions indicated that they and their brethren, the Mandara people were under the same leadership of the *Thlikse* in Ishga Kewe before the Mandara people moved to the mountainous area. The Gamergu, on the other hand, remained on the plains along the shores of River Yedseram and continued with their traditional belief and identified the *Dadathluliya* as their spiritual and political leader. The two groups still maintain their historical ties and long standing social relations.

The Chief Priest comes from the clan of *nda yagasəga*, the descendant of the Gamergu prince who disappeared into the trunks of the spiritual tree. His position is inherited by his eldest son or immediate male relative from the same clan. The position is not inherited by women. Under the spiritual and political setup the Chief Priest is then represented at the village level by series of lesser priests called *male*. The *male* are from different clans depending on the clans that founded the respective settlements. Hence *male* is appointed from the clans that are considered to be the founder or first settler of the village and will be an inherited position. Under each *male* are the Elders' Committee headed by the *male*, which is comprised of the clan heads and the elderly. The Committee is responsible for dispensing justice arising from inter-village conflicts, farmlands and social misunderstanding. The clan heads are also responsible for the conduct of each of their respective clans by intervening in any conflicts arising amongst its members. The clan head can refer any unresolved matters to the *male*. At the household level the head is seen as the person responsible for the conduct of his members and therefore resolve any minor grievances among them. In the event of any matters that require further intervention or advice the head may then refer to their clan head.

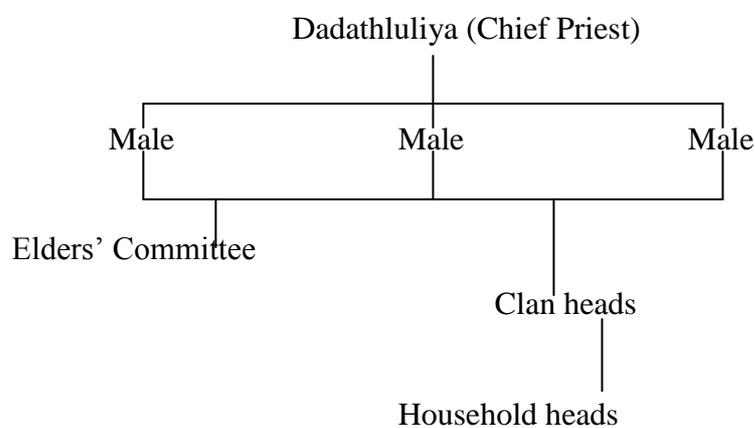


Figure 7: Link between the Chief Priest and the community heads

However, in the present dispensation where the Gamergu and other ethnic groups in modern Borno are under the Kanuri leadership the political hierarchy has changed completely. The spiritual and political leaders (the Chief Priest and the respective lesser priests) are no longer in control of the political affairs of their society. This is replaced by the Kanuri system of political representation under the leadership of the

lawan (village head) at the village unit. The village head is appointed by the Shehu (who is the overall political head of Borno Emirate) or his representative. Those under the *lawan* are the various *bulama* (ward heads). The village head oversees a number of ward heads within a single village or including certain number of hamlets in his vicinity¹⁰. The *male* still maintains his role as the religious leader but exercises a low profile in the society since his area of jurisdiction is losing ground in the modern society and he is answerable to the *lawan*. Similarly, the Elders' Committee is maintained but is under the headship of the respective village heads. This means that religious representation has become secondary under the new organisation. This arrangement is not new among Kanuri societies since the religious leader (*malam*) is always answerable to the political head of the village or district. The village heads are then under the district heads (*aja*), who are then answerable to the *waziri* and the Shehu.

Gamergu Judicial System

Gamergu elders' Committee is the highest ruling body in the community. The judiciary is constituted by the representatives of each clan, who must be the eldest person in each clan. The head of the Committee is the Chief Priest, *dada thluliya*, of Gamerguland. Hence the norms and values of the society are regulated by this body. Similarly, any criminal offence committed will be punished by the Committee. However, the judicial system works in a hierarchy starting from the lowest level to the highest ruling body.

Clan Level

The head of the clan¹¹ is the judge who adjudicates on offences committed by his clan members. That means the clan head will listen to any case brought to him by clan members and will punish those found to be offenders. A person that commits an offence will not be taken to a clan head other than his own for judgement. Similarly if two persons from different clans commit an offence then they are judged separately by their clan heads. However, where there is a conflict between two or more persons from different clans then the heads of the respective clans will form a committee together to judge on the case. Whatever judgement they passed will be

¹⁰ Chapter Four presents more information on the Kanuri political structure.

¹¹ In each Gamergu settlement there are different clans with each having their clan leader. He is the judge of his clan.

binding on those involved. The clan head will also be the place for resolving household matters that involved members of the family which the head of the family could not settle.

Village Level

In each village there is the Elders' Committee that is constituted by the respective clan heads and those identified as elderly settling in the village. The Committee is headed by the *male*, who is the spiritual leader of the community and the representative of the Chief Priest. A case is referred to this Committee if it is not resolved at the level of the clan heads due to its complexity or gravity of the offence or where a person repeats the same offence. Joint session of clan heads on offences involving two or more of their clan members that are not able to pass judgement will also be referred to the Committee headed by the *male*. This Committee's jurisdiction lies within the boundary of the community. The Committee can pass judgements on criminal offences and those cases that involve expelling offenders from the community.

Nature of Offences and Judgement

Of course conflicts and offences ranging from minor to major are committed by individuals and groups in Gamerguland that enable the respective leaders to punish offenders and to serve as deterrent for intending offenders. Judgement passed by the leaders depends on the nature and gravity of the offence committed. For example, a murder case usually involves payment of ransom to the family of the murdered person. That means the family of the murderer or his relatives will give their daughter in marriage to the son or relative of the murdered person without payment of any bride price. Furthermore, if the marriage doesn't result in the birth of a male child then the ransom is still considered as not being paid. However, the family of the murdered person may choose to receive the ransom in valuables such as cows or sheep. Certain offences such as stealing require the offender to return the goods stolen and pay a fine set by the judge. There are certain offences which are classified as being ritual or requiring ritual performance to adjudicate. This type of offence is then handled by the spiritual leader in the community; i.e. *male* and not the clan leader or the Elders' Committee. Such types of offence may involve witchcraft or spells. An individual may go to a native soothsayer to request a spell against

someone in order to harm or kill the person. When such a person is caught then he is accused of the offence, which can only be judged spiritually. On the other hand a person may be accused of being a witch for killing or harming someone. In these situations the accused will be taken to the *male* in order to take oath at the sacred tree. After oath taking the offender will be under close supervision by the members of the community who believe that he may die or catch an incurable disease if guilty.

Other offences such as conflict between family members, husbands and wives, etc. are resolved amicably by clan leaders and the Elder's Committee. A conflict between husband and wife, for example, can even lead to divorce, which is within the jurisdiction of the clan leaders. Farmland and boundary conflicts are usually resolved by the Elder's Committee but in some complex situations it may go up to the Chief.

Witness

Witnesses are very important whenever there are conflicts and subsequently play a crucial role in the process of judgement. Clan leaders and the Elders' Committee rely on presentations made by witnesses in dispensing cases but they usually verify such presentations by making the witnesses take an oath. Sometimes a witness may be unreliable or inconsistent hence the judges will have to rely on their common sense, after hearing the views of those involved in the conflict, to guide their judgement. There are certain offences that may not require a witness since the judgement may be to warn the offender against any future occurrence. Such offences may be related to breaking the code of conduct of the society.

Legal change

The Gamergu social hierarchy and judicial system has undergone considerable transformation because of the intervention of the Kanuri traditional institutions. Kanuri system of traditional hierarchy has been introduced to Gamerguland, which starts at the ward level headed by the ward head, through the village head up to the overall head of the Kanuri, the Shehu. Nevertheless, some of the traditional structures of the Gamergu remained unchanged. The various clan heads and the elders' committees remain in place and play important role in the social and spiritual life of the people. Hence the *male* still heads the elders' committee with its membership of clan heads being maintained. However, the position of the village

head is today in line with what obtains in Kanuri settlements. The office of the District head was not in use under Gamergu political hierarchy until the office was introduced during the colonial administration in the early 20th century. In the modern political dispensation the functions of the political head and that of the spiritual leader are clearly distinguished. Hence the village head is the political head of the community whereas the elder's committee and the clan heads are spiritual leaders. The office of the committee is under the village head in the present set up. This is however, different under the Gamergu leadership era where the functions of the spiritual leaders overlap with that of the political head.

CONCLUSION

The information presented in this chapter is intended to attempt at re-constructing Gamergu polity and also to provide us with an insight into how Gamergu society emerged. Our knowledge of Gamergu culture is based heavily on oral traditions since literature on the culture is limited. We cannot, therefore, claim to know Gamergu culture that used to be before the influence of Kanuri on the region. Historical legends of the people as observed in this chapter are also influenced by those of the Kanuri and Wandala. Nonetheless there is also some scientific dimension to the origin of ancient settlements in Gamergu occupied areas from the archaeological discoveries made by Connah. His excavations at Maidbe about 60km east of Bama in the sandy country of Gamergu show the existence of a ruined town probably dating from the latter part of the fifteenth century, and which he thinks may have been abandoned in the eighteenth century. Other discoveries at Kambile north of Maidbe show Sao pottery type and tools that may suggest fishing and farming as the major industries of the inhabitants of the area. Observations on the origins of some ancient Gamergu settlements such as Ishga Kewe, Dogumba, Iza Garu, Gawa, Muna, Kajeri and Boboshe has provided us with some details of the emergence and nature of clan distribution among the Gamergu. Clan distribution as observed in the chapter has served as the basis of social organisation and pattern of settlements. Such distributions also influenced Gamergu marriage system, ritual practice and judiciary. The formation of Gamergu polity is seen by the Kanuri society who infringe on them as a pagan group that was subject to raids and heavy taxation. The next chapter will

also present Gamergu neighbours who are also among the aboriginal groups in the region but perceived by the Kanuri as pagan tribes.

CHAPTER FOUR

GAMERGU AND ITS NEIGHBOURS: POPULATION DISTRIBUTION/MIGRATION AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

INTRODUCTION

Like much of Nigeria, Borno state has a large number of ethnic groups. Whilst the Kanuri are the majority of the population nowadays, other ethnic groups continue to exist and seem once to have occupied large areas which are now conceived of as Kanuri. It seems that the Kanuri people came to occupy the areas around present day Maiduguri metropolitan up to the Mandara Mountains at a later period than the original ethnic groups. Successive Kanuri leaders from the Sayfawa dynasty to the Kanem Empire conquered much of the area and converted a great majority of the population from their traditional religion to Islam. Yet despite the introduction of Islam to the area a substantial number of non-Kanuri even now maintain their traditional rites and in some cases mix them with Islamic rites. To the Kanuri such a mixture of practices of the different religions was unholy. They categorically condemned such practices and thereby lumped such syncretists under the same category as those that had never embraced Islam. The term *kirdi* is used by the Kanuri to refer to these non-Muslim pagan groups that occupied the area from the Mandara Mountains in the south and east up to the Kamadugu Yobe valley in the north. The Gamergu population of the present-day Kanuri capital of Maiduguri (toward the Mandara Mountains) maintained their traditional pagan lifestyle until the arrival of the Kanuri in the area, but pagan activities ceased with the intervention of the Kanuri. Nonetheless, they continue to be categorised as *kirdi* by some Kanuri.

According to Palmer (1936, 255) the Gamergu themselves were driven from the regions east of their present habitat (i.e. closer to the ancient centre of Kanem/Bornu) by the Berbers who advanced from the region of Fis (near Musgu), Balda and Waraga Dubuwa. The inhabitants of Amsaka were said to have spoken Gamergu and Palmer suggests that the present Marghi and Bura languages belong to this Massa group. Consequently, Palmer observed that Amsaka, Maidbe and Mandara Garau are

reputed to have been ruled by the same kind of people. This information shows how it might be that the Kanuri classified the people in the region as *kirdi*.

Such a classification of non-Kanuri ethnic groups by local Kanuri was accompanied by discrimination and reluctance to engage in inter-marriage and other forms of social interaction. This also made it difficult for the non-Kanuri people to assume any respectable position of authority. The result of the continuous dominance by the Kanuri in the area made a lot of the population in the minority groups to assimilate into the Kanuri culture. Many groups that associated with the Kanuri for long periods, including sections of Mandara, Pabir and Marghi, inter-married with them thereby losing their original identity to Kanuri identity. As inter-marriage and political dominance by the Kanuri increased over the decades some groups within Borno had their identity subsumed to a Kanuri identity. But this process is complicated by other forms of classification and historical change.

THE SAO PEOPLE

It is the assumption of some scholars¹² that the Kanuri collectively refer to the Chadic speaking people in the area (which included a number of ethnic groups today identified as the Kotoko, Buduma, Ngizim, Bade, Gamergu and Mandara) as the Sao. This understanding was based on linguistic classification since the ethnic groups that lived in the area prior to the later arrival of the Kanuri and Shuwa-Arabs were Chadic-speakers. However Meek (1925) mentioned the Sao as possibly tall Nilotic invaders like the Jukun, or they may have formed a portion of the aboriginal semi-Bantu stock. Nevertheless there is little evidence that the Sao, contrary to some speculations, were ever a large group compared to the Gamergu population or Marghi and Mowar groups. According to oral tradition (Maina, 1996 pers. Comm.) the Mowar people lived with their Sao neighbours along the shores of River Yobe. The Mowar are today assimilated into Kanuri culture and form one of the dialects of Kanuri whereas some part of the population claim to have moved in a westerly direction and claim Bade in Gashua area. In contrast to these surviving ethnic groups and sub-cultural categories, the term “Sao” has no identifiable Kanuri background

¹² According to Hickey (1985) the Sao population of Borno survived their encounter with the Kanuri and are today dispersed into three groups namely the Ngizim-Bade, the Buduma-Kotoko and the Gamergu-Mandara stock hence were totally assimilated.

since it has no linguistic meaning in the language. On the other hand there is evidence of the use of certain words in Kanuri to refer to some ethnic groups in the region, which are still in use. For example, the word Afuno is used by the Kanuri to refer to the Hausa people, which was from the word funo in Kanuri¹³. Another example is the use of the word ‘Gamergu’¹⁴ to refer to the Malgwa, which is also undoubtedly in use today. If the Kanuri could have used a single word to refer to different ethnic groups at that time then such word like ‘*kirdi*’ which means ‘pagan’ or non- Muslim would have been more appropriate since the entire region was certainly not Islamized at the time. One possible explanation for the disappearance of the Sao could be total assimilation after they were defeated by the Kanuri. Palmer states:

The migration of the people of Kanem has had lasting effect on their cultures and also speech. The Kanuri invaders met the principal inhabitants of the country south of the river Yobe who were the Sao tribes. Some traditions say they spoke the Kanuri language before the transfer of the capital from Njimi to Kasr Kumo, which was at the end of the 15th Century. This may be because they were akin to the inhabitants of Kanem or more likely due to the fact the Kanem Empire had spread already over the southern country and Sao may have been bilingual before the capital was moved south and the people absorbed politically (Palmer, 1936, 100)

The Kanuri must have eliminated the majority of the Sao population and possibly the young ones and women that survived were completely assimilated into the Kanuri culture as captives were used by the Kanuri to work on the farms. Another explanation could be that those Sao that survived, especially those in the southern part of Borno, could have been assimilated into the Kotoko and Buduma stock as claimed by the people making reference to their mighty physical appearance and proximity to the area. But it may well be that “Sao” was an ethnic category used in

¹³ When the Kanuri saw the Hausa they were only covering their bodies with skin called funo in Kanuri. The Kanuri then called them ‘am funoa’ meaning people with funo, hence Afuno.

¹⁴ The word was derived from the Kanuri word ‘ngawarwu’, which means the aboriginal people because the Kanuri met the Gamergu in the region.

opposition to subjects of Borno, in the same way as the banza-Bokwai categorically mirrored the original seven Hausa states (Sharpe, pers. comm.)

Before the coming of the Kanuri to the region Gamergu oral tradition indicated that they were not on favourable terms with the Sao people. There were frequent skirmishes between the Gamergu and the Sao where the Gamergu admittedly suffered defeats even though they were a majority. According to Gamergu tradition they eventually succeeded in defeating the Sao by tricking them into eating poisonous leaves (Gege, 1995).

MARGHI

The Marghi, according to Schultze (1968, original 1913), occupied the important village of Maifoni in present day Maiduguri before they drifted southward and some of them assimilated into Kanuri culture. Their origin is not clear but it is possible that they formed part of the extinct Sao people. Wenté-Lukas (1985, 261) also supports the point that the Marghi occupied a more northerly position before the consolidation of the Borno Empire. Their present location is to the western side of the Mandara Mountain, south and west of the Gamergu occupied areas. According to Barkindo (1989, 39) the Marghi are composed of groups with diverse traits of varying historical depth consisting of western, southern, eastern and plains Marghi. Hence within this complex division the western Marghi have abandoned their language (putai) and traditions and were also assimilated as Kanuri. Others drifted gradually to the south to inhabit the regions they now occupy (Abubakar, 1977, 16).

BURA/PABIR

The Biu-Mandara ancestral groups according to linguistics include the Bura, Kilba, Marghi, Chibuk and the Pabir of Biu. It is observed that the Pabir royal clan Woviri came from the north and was either of Teda-Kanuri or Mandara origin. They are ethnically different from the Bura, but speak a common language (Wenté-Lukas, 1985, 299). According to Pabir tradition the dynasty was founded by a Kanuri prince called Yamta who left Gazargamo because he failed to become Mai. Some traditions also mentioned his wife as a Bura, a daughter to the Chief of Minga (Cohen, 1983,

48). Yamta then founded Dlimbur, near Mandaragirau and established his rule over the neighbouring Bura people. Their present location according to Wente-Lukas (1985, 57) is Biu Division in Borno and Askira districts. The Biu Plateau and a number of Bura villages extend into Adamawa Province.

MAFA

This is a large group who live in the Mandara Mountains with Mokolo as their centre. They are called Wulla by the Kanuri and Matakam by the Fulani. The majority live in Cameroon and both there and in Nigeria they maintain their traditional pagan way of life. The Mafa's present location in Nigeria is at Loghpare but those recently migrated can be found in the plain not far from the southern border area of Gwoza town and within Kanuri or Gamergu settlements in the vicinity of Maiduguri. There is also a Matakam quarter in Maiduguri (Wente-Lukas, 1985, 262).

The Borno state, Kanuri identity and ethnic categorisation

It is clear that over the centuries, the Borno political system has assimilated many non-Kanuri groups, and many are now indistinguishable from Kanuri. However, in modern Borno a lot of the core¹⁵ Kanuri people are sceptical in identifying such assimilated people as being "real" Kanuri. The core Kanuri in this regard does not refer to the royal family but rather to the Kanuri peasants since the royal family, and many Lawans, modern politicians and district heads are not considered to have a pure Kanuri background. Hence there is prejudice against such people, particularly in the village units of the core Kanuri rather than in the urban centres. This is because the core Kanuri regard the urban dwellers as mixture of different ethnic groups. This has made life difficult for those that may not be from the core Kanuri. Political representation has become a disputed venture as some of the minority groups that claim Kanuri identity are now in high positions. It is in view of this that some influential Kanuri promote disparity with such highly placed Kanurized individuals. This momentum also placed the minority groups in the position to promote their ethnic identity publicly. Hence some highly placed and wealthy people within the non-Kanuri political group decided to break away from the dominant Kanuri class in

¹⁵ The core Kanuri in this regard refers to those that can trace their origin and those of their parents and grandparents to Kanuri in the recent past without intermarriages with other ethnic groups.

order to defend and promote their cultural identity. The idea of promoting their culture is not in the area of traditional religious practices but rather to identify with their languages, cultural heritage, and birthplace. They associate themselves with their traditional values and press for representation both at the political level and in the civil service. Indeed this has yielded some results as many of them have succeeded in getting new local governments created in their areas. They could now elect their own representatives at the local council and also get represented both at the State and national levels. They have also made it possible for the State to form its government equally in line with a power sharing formula. They are continuously pushing for more representation and even for State creation in the future.

Nevertheless, others within the minority groups are opposing the breakaway from the Kanuri people. Such groups that oppose the struggle for ethnic identity and representation are among those who have been long assimilated into the Kanuri culture. They are of the opinion that their groups have since been identified with the Kanuri and they only moved to the areas of their present habitat after displacing the original settlers. This is indeed one of the major areas of contention that some anthropologists and historians are still investigating. An example of one of such places is Maifoni (Mabani), which is in present-day Maiduguri but was reported by early travellers such as Barth, Nachtigal, etc as a stronghold of the Marghi and Gamergu peoples. Today the area is identified as being inhabited by the Kanuri; but whether the original settlers were assimilated or pushed further southward by the Kanuri is yet to be confirmed.

In consequence of this ethnic marginalisation the struggle for cultural recognition and political representation has been reinforced as a result of democratization in all levels of Government. Among the ethnic groups that promote their cultural identity is that of Marghi, who are also classified as *kirdi* by the Kanuri because of their traditional beliefs before being Islamized. Among the individuals that are at the forefront of the campaign is one Maina, who is a politician and wealthy person. In order to identify with his group and to promote their culture he changed the name of his company to identify with his culture and equally suffix the name of his language against his name. One of his ideas of promoting unity and understanding among his people was the formation of a youth association and an elders' group. The group has

since become a strong representative of their people and culture, which also agitated for the creation of a new local government of their own. They succeeded in getting the local government created. Even though Maina is criticised for the promotion of his cultural identity by the Kanuri and some individuals from his ethnic group he has maintained his enthusiasm for the promotion of his cultural values among his people. The opposition from within his ethnic group comes from those that are assimilated into the Kanuri tradition and who do not associate themselves with their original Marghi identity. These Kanurized Marghi people do not wish to be identified as being assimilated by the Kanuri. They maintain the view that they are originally Kanuri but moved to settle in the area alongside the Marghi. However, Marghi political activists are of the opinion that such claimed Kanuri living in their region are indeed Marghi by origin but only identify with Kanuri people in order to gain political positions and dissociate themselves from Marghi cultural norms. This group has also high representation that always strongly opposes the struggle of the activists group and do succeed in some instances. The Kanuri political class support them in their own way as identifying with the Kanuri for the sake of forming an opposition to the struggle of the Marghi activists so that the Kanuri will gain the profit of the struggle. This is because when the opposition block the way for political representation claimed by the Marghi for example, this will be of advantage to the Kanuri representation. An example of such opposition is the blocking of the agitation for the creation of Savannah State whose capital would have been Damboa – a Marghi town – but instead the unpopular Yobe State was created in 1996 with the capital at Damaturu – a Kanuri/Fulani town.

To return to the ideas of the frontier advanced in Chapter Two, events on the periphery respond to processes in the centre, and *vice versa* as centre and periphery move over the land. For example, the Mandara dynasty, which was a strong sultanate, was also a vassal state of the Borno Empire. Even though the sultanate was Islamised during the El-Kanemi period “core” Kanuri people still categorise those from Mandara as *kirdi* since they believe that groups in the Mandara Mountains maintain their pagan activities. Equally, however, many of the Kanuri are more subtle about this generalisation. A philanthropist and wealthy man from the Mandara ethnic group called Ummate today identifies with his culture and promotes the cause of uniting his people. He is a renowned public figure and elder statesman, respected

in the community and who is also known to resolve a lot of disputes among individuals, organisations and government. He has brought the youths of Mandara background together by forming an association to promote unity among their ethnic individuals and their communities. He is the patron of the association and has a strong followership across the country toward uniting youth, development and interaction.

Even though the groups mentioned above have people that can be considered as political activists in the promotion of their cultural identity and in some cases with established oppositions, the Gamergu situation is completely different. Despite the fact that there are more Kanurized-Gamergu in the political hierarchy of Borno the local Gamergu population are not represented by activist groups from their community. The Kanurized-Gamergu that have assumed positions of authority in the State neither identify with their original Gamergu culture nor promote the cause of Gamergu unity. Consequently the local Gamergu communities that are distant from the centre are not represented in the political hierarchy in the struggle for equal representation and the promotion of their cultural identity. The local population, therefore, have felt disappointed and betrayed by their indigenes in positions of high authority, especially in this era of agitation for political representation in all levels of the government. Those Kanurized-Gamergu that do not associate or identify with the original Gamergu identity do so because of their identity being linked to pagan/non-Muslim activity, which they feel is degrading to their new status. The contention is that even though the Gamergu are Islamised they still stick to their traditional beliefs¹⁶ that are against Islamic religion. In addition the Gamergu are said to be at the forefront of those ethnic groups in Borno that combine both their traditional beliefs and that of Islam. They are known to practice their traditional rituals that take place annually, which form part of their religious belief. It is also the belief of the Kanurized-Gamergu that in this era of political and religious upheavals it is wiser to go along with the majority rather than sticking to old traditional beliefs that will dent their image. That is why the Gamergu culture has today been reduced to the village level with their large towns completely assimilated into Kanuri culture. Therefore,

¹⁶ This is exemplified by the practice of *hile*, *zawada* and other forms of rituals associated with the Gamergu traditional belief system.

Gamergu culture is in present times mainly associated with those settling in hamlets outside of the urban centres along the River Yedseram.

CONCLUSION

The Gamergu co-existed peacefully with their neighbours, especially the Marghi and Mafa, even though oral traditions among the Gamergu attest to the disappearance of the ancient Sao to gradual conquest by the Gamergu themselves. The Gamergu did not however claim skirmishes with the Sao but did confirm that they tricked them to eat poisonous plants that led to their gradual death. The Gamergu people and their neighbours have been exposed to different levels of acculturation from the dominant Kanuri group at the centre. Acculturation in this regard is referred to the flow of cultural elements between two or more groups of people (Berry et al, 1986) but it is being asserted that the process involves a domination of one cultural group by another. The Kanuri at the centre therefore assert its dominance over the subordinate groups at the frontier of its polity. The complex issues that arise in this context of the moving boundary between the Kanuri power at the centre and the ethnic groups at the periphery are also determined by the way in which the ethnic groups respond. The nature of relationships and economic stability with the centre also influence the interaction with the centre. It is in this respect that apart from the Sao, who are completely extinct, the other ethnic groups such as the Marghi, and Bura/Pabir have gone far in their struggle for cultural and political recognition in the modern cosmopolitan Kanuri-dominated society. They are able to recognise Local Government areas under their control and continue to receive political representation both in the State and the Federal Government. The peaceful atmosphere in the region would, however be overturned. We will come to see in the following chapter the insurgence of the more powerful and politically advanced Kanuri into Gamergu territories. The Kanuri had a history of migration and conquest of several groups along the Lake Chad region down to the Mandara Mountains. The frontier region is therefore, an area that subjects itself to the dictates of the urban centre where both economic and political changes at the centre influence the frontier state. It is this state of influence that affects the nature of migration from and into the frontier zone. The main activities in the frontier area that attracts people to the region are its agricultural prospects and cultural inclusion. The Gamergu arable land, in this regard, has largely contributed toward influx of migrant farmers from the urban

centres to the frontier zone. However the out migration from the area are dictated by the urban centre's job opportunity or expected improvement of economic condition of the rural individual where Gamergu and other people from the frontier zone work in the urban cities under cheap labour.

CHAPTER FIVE

PATTERNS OF RELATIONS WITH THE KANURI MIGRANTS

INTRODUCTION

Even though the main focus of this chapter will be on the period of the El-Kanemi leadership in the 19th Century a few references to the Sayfawa¹⁷ times will be made here. Kanuri have been present in Gamerguland since the Sayfawa Dynasty. Similarly, the El-Kanemi leadership also continued to raid the Gamergu people which resulted in capturing many of their people for slavery. Most of the raids were purportedly undertaken for religious reasons though getting slaves by the rulers was very much on their agenda (Denham, 1826). However, most of the raids by the Borno rulers into Gamergu land were met with strong resistance where in some instances raiders were overpowered and chased away. Gamergu on the other hand have also raided adjacent Kanuri settlements, especially during the El-Kanemi period, in the mid 19th century, when many Kanuri had moved southwards toward the Gamergu settlements. Such raids, according to the Gamergu people were mainly to steal young women to become wives and boys to grow up as part of their family for future use on the farms. The idea of stealing Kanuri women and boys by the Gamergu was merely for incorporation into their society rather than for slavery compared to raids by the Kanuri on their people. The Gamergu describe themselves as physically stronger and more intelligent than the Kanuri (Bukar, Burari, 1998). This resistance and confidence of the Gamergu together with their localised defence mechanism enabled them to withstand the mighty and continual aggression of the Kanuri rulers. In spite of this resistance, the Gamergu eventually became subordinate of the Kanuri. The arrival of the Shehu to Maiduguri at the beginning of the 20th century saw a continued renewal of the Kanuri military aggression as well as their policy of spreading Islam to pagan groups including that of Gamergu population. Now with the seat of power closer to the central Gamergu area, campaigns towards conversion of the population into Islam were intensified. By the mid 20th Century, these campaigns were often backed up with threats of imprisonment or fines imposed

¹⁷ The Sayfawa period could be said to be the earliest period in Borno history that saw the insurgence of the Zaghawa and Kanuri people into Gamergu occupied area.

by the village heads who were directed to supervise them. That meant that ceremonies and rituals that are not permitted in Islam were not acceptable to the Kanuri leadership. This has directly put most Gamergu in a position of enmity with the Kanuri people. All the Gamergu settlements at the time were under the leadership of Kanuri village heads that resided amongst them. The arrival of Rabeah to Borno ushered in a new perspective on political authority. The Gamergu settlements, especially those in Dogumba and Boboshe admitted taking advantage of the opportunity and recognized the leadership of Rabeah by paying homage to him in Dikwa (Gege, Boboshe, 1993 and Baya, et al, Dogumba, 1993). Before the coming of Rabeah to Borno the Gamergu people were partly Islamised and many Kanuri people moved to settle in Gamergu villages. It was at that time that the process of Kanurization of the Gamergu population started on the linguistic level (Cyffer, et al, 1996). By the time Rabeah was killed and his administration ended most Gamergu had started speaking fluent Kanuri language as a result of intermarriages and cohabitation (Gege, Boboshe, 1993 and Adam, Gawa, 1993). Many Gamergu people that were met by the Kanuri in Maiduguri town and others from the villages around were totally assimilated into the Kanuri both linguistically and culturally. A lot of such people that were assimilated have now assumed positions of power and wealth.

KANURI MIGRATION INTO THE REGION

The arrival of the Kanuri in the region as we observed in the introductory chapter has had a profound political and socio-economic impact on the region and its inhabitants. There are a number of ethnic groups in the area that were influenced by the presence of Kanuri; but the most affected were the autochthonous Gamergu people. There was evidence of Kanuri migration into modern Borno even before the Sayfawa Mais moved their capital from the eastern side of the Lake to the western side. During the Sayfawa period the Mais were engaged in attacking the pagan autochthonous groups in the region such as the Mandara, the Marghi, the Gamergu, etc. for the purpose of getting slaves and booty (Lange, 1987, 65). Even though the Mais had in their agenda to convert the pagans into Islamic faith, as mentioned earlier, there were however, no structures (such as mosques, Quranic schools, etc that existed in most Kanuri settlements) put in place to achieve this endeavour, which could be as a result of their earlier mentioned raids for the purpose of acquiring booty. Nevertheless one

of the main interests of the Borno rulers was to expand the territory for political and economic gains, particularly the raids carried out by Mai Idris Alooma who led the Sayfawa Dynasty to its peak (Lange, 1987). The areas occupied by the Gamergu and other autochthonous groups are known to be productive for agriculture, given the scale of production and trade and which was the main preoccupation of the people as is also observed today.

The increasing migration at the time of the Kanuri into the area was as a result of the demise of the ancient Kanem Empire east of the Lake Chad. However, it was during the reign of Mai Ali Gaji (1465-1497) that the Sayfawa Dynasty firmly established its permanent fortified capital at Birni Gazargamo. It was then, according to Barkindo (1989, 94) that the Sayfawa started their conquest trying to build a second Sayfawa state at Borno. Given the high concentration of population in the region and economic activity the Kanuri then directed their attention to the area. It was this state of apogee reached by the rulers of Borno that forced the indigenous people to either flee into inaccessible areas or to stand their ground and face the enemy. However whereas the Gamergu chose to remain at their present habitat the Wandala (Mandara) and other groups such as the Bolewa, Ngizim, Bade, Pabir and Marghi decided to adopt some form of protective response against the emerging power in the 15th Century. These groups eventually succeeded in establishing independent chiefdoms that developed new ideas from amongst their local populations and also adopted some political models from the Kanuri. The Wandala consequently succeeded in creating a fairly centralized state which was able to face Borno (Barkindo, 1989, 95). It is observed that the Kanuri nation of Borno Empire was not the sole creation of the Kanem migrant groups but also the gradual absorption of other non-Muslim/non-Kanuri elements (Cohen et al 1974, 94; James, 1987, 58) since the movement of the Sayfawa capital from the east of the Lake Chad to the west in the mid 15th Century. The Kanuri introduced Islamic religion into the region. The Gamergu as an acephalous group were by far the most demographically numerous of the tribes in the region with some degree of religious centralization as opposed to central political authority. The Kanuri having raided Gamergu settlements also sought to assert their high Islamic values by destabilizing their centralized religion. This condition undoubtedly led to conflict and series of conquests and campaigns by the Kanuri

leaders in an effort to break the resistance of the tribes on their southern borders.

Lavers states:

For reasons that we cannot explain pockets of resistance as represented by the original inhabitants of Borno had been allowed to exist and to endanger the internal security of the state. Some such foci of the resistance existed within a day's march of the capital. The problem was resolved over a period of time by a scorched earth policy and continual harassment by which the dissident elements were forced either to submit or migrate. In the south of the country dissident groups such as the Gamaghu were contained by a series of *ribats* or frontier fortress on Borno side of the frontier and by alliances with the rulers of the nascent states of the Mandara and Pabir on the other (Lavers, 1982, 196).

Even though Lavers made this statement the problem of Gamergu resistance was never resolved for a long period of time.

The area of Gamergu occupation is a centre of economic resources and it is not coincidence that the Borno rulers' interest in the region, especially during the times of the Sayfawa Dynasty was mainly economic. One of the main sources of income for the Mais of the Sayfawa was the export of slaves hence the area of Gamergu has been an unlimited source of slaves for centuries. The Sayfawa therefore allocated certain key positions such as that of Mastrema, Yerima, Kaigama and, later, the Galadima to serve such purpose on the southern fringes of Borno. The area was laden with garrisons to aid the Kaigama to check immediate threats without necessarily involving the capital. The Emirate of Dikwa which was established in 1596 southeast of the capital could be seen as a result of such policy.

The eighteenth century was a period of crisis for Borno where there had been repeated famines and undoubtedly Gamergu were also trying to take advantage of Borno's relative weakness. However the Borno rulers never doubted the Gamergu as one of their source of conflict. During the time of Mai Mohammed Hamdu (1781 CE) it was reported that this song portrayed his person:

Of those who wear Turban and those who wear only loin clothes you are the Chief. You are the ruler alike of men who have a leather loin cloths tied between their legs of those who ride on fine horses (Patterson, 1926).

It is clear from this praise song how Borno rulers' approach was toward the non-Muslim tribes in Borno. During the period a majority of the Gamergu population decided to preserve their ethnic identity and religion hence did not adopt Islam. It is as a result of the Gamergu posture that the Borno rulers intensified their pursuit, during this period, in trying to absorb the Gamergu tribes into the mainstream of the Kanuri culture. Hence the office of the Kaigama was a distinct example of a policy designed to take into account the political implications of the existence of diverse ethnic groups in the state. His functions include the policing and defence of the southern frontiers of Borno. According to Ibn Fartua (1970) the Kaigama during the reign of Mai Dugu Breimi was one Bukar Gamergu. His possible residence at that time could have been Dikwa for reasons of proximity to the southern fringes.

However, at a later period of the El-Kanemi Empire (20th Century) colonial reports (Patterson, 1921, 1923 and Harford, 1927) on the area and White (1966, 99-100) have shown that there was constant lawlessness and rebellions associated with the Gamergu people, which led the people in authority to attribute major crimes in the area to them. The state of lawlessness could have been caused by constant raids undertaken against them by the Kanuri leadership which resulted in the destruction of their settlements. Harford states:

Not only is the Gamergu country itself in the state of lawlessness, but the Gamergu robbers emboldened by their impunity are making more and more frequent thieving expedition into Borno districts of Konduga, Uje and Marghi (Harford, NAK, 1927, 21).

This appears to have been the stereotype of the Gamergu in Borno though it could be argued that the Gamergu were making efforts to counter Kanuri raids on their population and an attempt towards resistance. Similarly the Mandara sultanate as a vassal state of Borno was directed by the Kanuri rulers to contain any such outbreak of lawlessness (Barkindo, 1989, 103). However, Barkindo further stated that the

Mandara took advantage of the situation, (contrary to this directive from their Kanuri overlord) by encouraging Gamergu insurrection so as to secure their frontier from Borno. Because of their historical affinity with the Gamergu the Mandara maintained a chaotic situation in southern Borno so as to keep the Borno leaders busy. Similarly the Mandara were aware of the fact that the Gamergu population was closer to the Kanuri hence was more vulnerable to Kanuri attacks. Consequently the Mandara people took this advantage to use the Gamergu as a bulwark between them and the Kanuri knowing that the Gamergu as pagans were attractive to the Kanuri leadership. The Mandara people were living together with their Gamergu brethren before they moved to their present location in the Mandara Mountains around the 16th Century with their first capital at Kerawa. Though the Gamergu still maintained their affinal link with the Mandara, it is possible that the Mandara leadership looked on the Gamergu as their subordinates. They also, at the same time see the Gamergu as insubordinates having not moved together with them to their present location.

Kanuri and Gamergu Relations

The Gamergu could be said to have taken advantage of the Kanuri presence in the region to promote their economic activities by taking part in trading and other commercial engagements. Barth (1965) confirmed that important markets had at one time flourished south of the Yedseram River. The markets were estimated to have up to 150-200 stalls and were multi-ethnic in that Shuwa, Fulani, Marghi, Gamergu and Kanuri were in regular attendance. Economic prosperity of the Gamergu dates back to a long period of time as archaeological excavation indicated. According to Barkindo (1989, 36) the Gamergu even in the distant past were industrious farmers and craftsmen and many of their settlements were established at points where frontier markets must have been situated to offer commercial exchange between neighbouring but warring groups. Similarly Lake Alau, which is discussed in chapter eight, is one of the main areas that facilitated economic prosperity of the region that could be said to have attracted immigrants. The Gamergu could have played a leading role in the supply of food items to the northern region of the state up to the 18th Century because of their agricultural production.

Despite continued conflict between the Gamergu and the Kanuri from the period of the reign of the Sayfawa Mais up to the El-Kanemi Empire economic relations proportionately continued to flourish even to the present century. The conflicts became even more erratic during the reign of the El-Kanemi Empire from 1814 to 1893 after which Rabeah appeared in the scene. The fall of the Sayfawa capital, Birni Gazargamo brought about the dispersal of its population and also saw the influx of several ethnic groups (such as Fulani, Bulala, etc.) into the area causing further formidable impact on the lives of the former inhabitants of Borno. The Gamergu population felt the pressure more since they were gradually pushed further south where they were also pressed between the opposing powers of the Mandara and the Borno Empire. The Shuwa Arabs were certainly putting pressure from the eastern fringe of Borno which added to the instability of the Gamergu people. The Fulani people of Adamawa province and those residing in Borno (Hickey, 1985, 221-222) did not help matters for the Gamergu either as they took part in the Fulani Jihad of the 19th Century. The Fulani Jihad in Borno also saw the destruction of Muna which was reported by Barth as being one of the main settlements of the Gamergu. The Gamergu population of Muna were then forced to migrate to Uje and Alau and some to Dogumba.

However, the Kanuri migration to the area since before the Sayfawa capital was moved to Gazargamo could be said to be the beginning of acculturation and Kanurization of the Gamergu population. The Kanuri migrants engaged in commerce with the local Gamergu population were the first point where the gradual conversion to Islam took place (Gege: Boboshe, 1995). The involvement of Kanuri migrants in commerce also facilitated inter-marriage with the local population. It was easy for the Kanuri men to marry Gamergu women because of religious and cultural reasons. The Kanuri people that had sense of pride and religious superiority over the Gamergu could not allow their women to marry Gamergu men during the early part of the 19th Century. Marriage among the Gamergu as earlier mentioned in Chapter Two was informal and involves taking possession of the woman without any prior arrangement. In this regard the Kanuri by the virtue of their influence as the dominant group established relations through commerce to facilitate such inter-marriages. On the other hand it was not easy for the Gamergu men to marry Kanuri women since the Kanuri were Muslims it is forbidden for their women to marry non-

Muslims. Consequently inter-marriage was much more in favour of the Kanuri marrying Gamergu women.

Acculturation then began at this level with the Kanurization of the Gamergu population in the region. Hence the people in the areas reached by the Kanuri merchants started to speak Kanuri language as early as the 19th Century. This has enabled effective communication with the local people and has therefore, boosted commercial activities in the region. Nevertheless a number of Gamergu people were not contented with the new relations being developed with the Kanuri migrants, especially given the continuous hostilities of the leadership against their population even after the demise of Rabeh's leadership at the beginning of the 20th Century. Such people then retreated further south; away from locations dominated by the Kanuri migrants. The fact that the Kanuri migrants have had much influence on the Gamergu does not mean that the Gamergu have not exerted cultural influence on the Kanuri people. Barkindo has observed that tribal marks that were practised among the Kanuri found its way from Mandara and Gamergu tradition (see fig. 8 below). It is possible that there were other cultural elements of the Gamergu being imported into Kanuri culture. I am of the opinion that hairstyle such as *ghoto* is a Gamergu tradition being imported into Kanuri culture (see fig. 8 below). This type of hairstyle is mainly practised among Gamergu women but is also being applied by Kanuri elderly women. There is also the ritual celebration associated with the dead on the 40th day among the Gamergu is also practised by the Kanuri despite its non-Islamic link.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

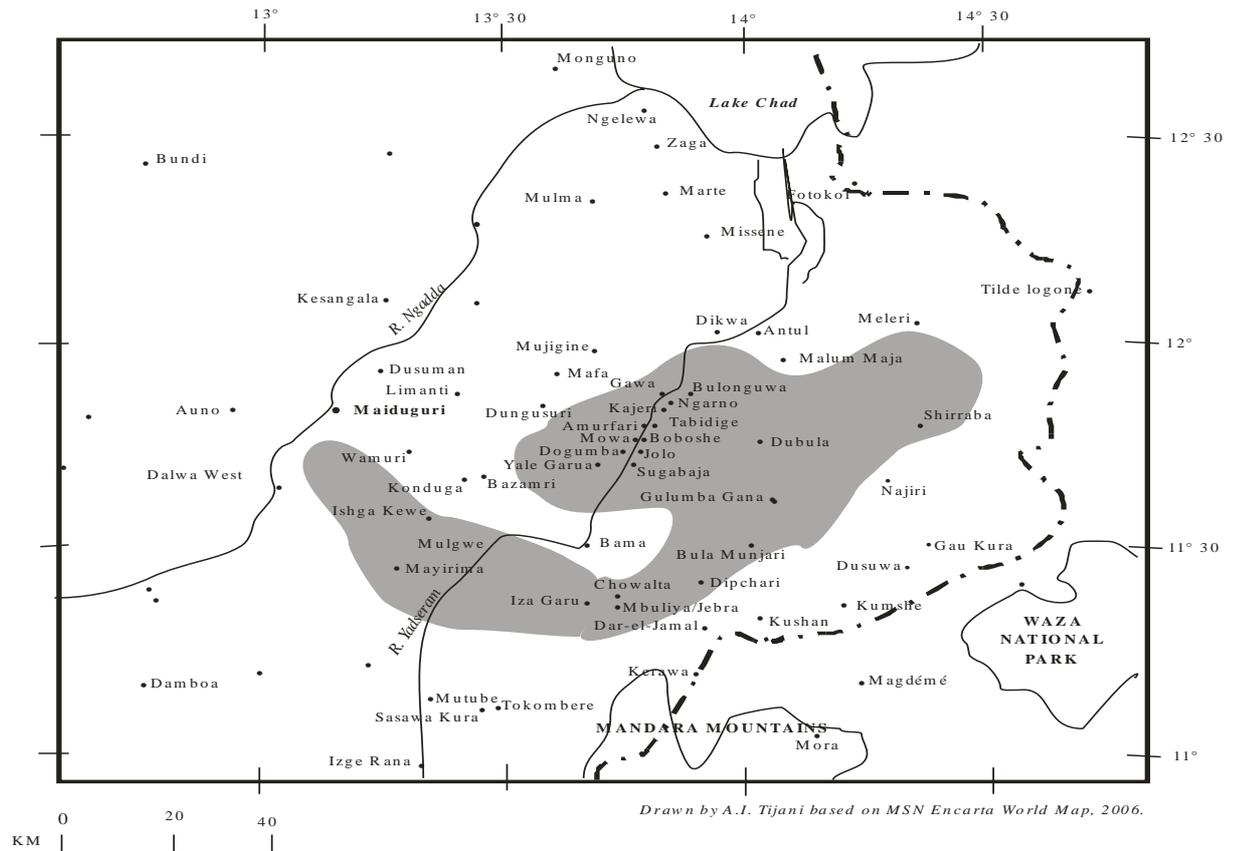
Figure 8: A typical Gamergu woman *ghoto* hairstyle

Further raids carried out during the El-Kanemi period in the 19th Century against the Gamergu population and other pagan tribes in the region continued with a view to subdue and convert them to Islam though the rights of the converts are mostly violated through enslavement. A typical example is that of Barka Gana, a Hausa person enslaved by El-Kanemi against Islamic Law but who later enjoyed the privileges of a favourite freedman and became one of the most powerful Commanders of the Borno army (*Kaigama*). According to Denham he had been captured by the Kanuri and taken to Borno as a slave where he had entered the Sheikh's household (Denham, 1973, 115). Nevertheless the military incursions were

mainly to expand their territories and for supplies of slaves. Islamic Law allows one to be captured but not enslaved. Denham further describes the situation at that time:

Those were turbulent times, however, and it was common after a siege or battle for the victors, hungry for booty, to round up prisoners without taking much trouble to ascertain whether they were all enemies. As for the inconvenient point of law, it was general practice of both sides to circumvent it by describing their opponents as apostates or heretics who, having forsaken the brotherhood of Islam, no longer enjoyed immunity from enslavement (Denham, 1973, 116)

It is when an area is secured by the military that the conversion exercise begins through the Islamic scholars. The Borno ruler, Sheikh Muhammad Al Amin El-Kanemi himself, a learned Islamic scholar engaged the pagan tribes in the region in warring activities in order to convert them to the Islamic faith through the involvement of existing political structures. It was during his period that the Mandara Sultanate was successfully brought under Borno as a vassal state. The Mandara leadership which was fully Islamized was then vested with the power of controlling pagan elements within its proximity, including the Gamergu who have historical ties with the Mandara people (Barkindo, 1989, 95). The power of the Sultanate had put them in an advantaged position to cause chaotic situation between pagan groups and the Kanuri leadership. As noted earlier the Mandara created such impasse in the region in order to divert the attention of the Kanuri leaders away from them. Borno insurgence in the region also continued with attacks against politically strong polities in the region such as the Marghi, Pabir, etc; but these groups maintained their political autonomy through defensive and diplomatic means. Since Gamergu were an acephalous polity compared to other centralised polities in the region they could not effectively defend their territory but instead a majority of the populace survived through retreat in order to escape from Kanuri hostility. The Kanuri then succeeded in taking control of Gamergu villages and placed them under the Kanuri political structure.



Map 2: Gamergu concentration at the Borno periphery in the 21st Century

The Gamergu under Kanuri Political System of Administration

In Kanuri tradition the entire land belongs to the Shehu who has the authority to distribute it. The El-Kanemi leadership developed a system of land tenure which formed the basis of political administration and system of taxation. The Shehu is vested with the power of allocating the territories into fiefs under the control of (*Chima Kura*) fief holder. The *Chima Kura* can either be a member of the royal family or those in positions of authority such as the Kaigama (military commander) who were allocated such fiefs as ways of remunerating and providing them with an independent means of subsistence. The *Chima Kura* is referred to as the absentee landlord because he usually resided in the capital (Kukawa) or in the case of a military commander resided at his garrison station. He does not reside at his fief, though occasionally he maintained a house there where he can reside during visits. A fief allocated to a *Chima* may vary in size from a single village or to as large as a district or two. The demarcation of groups of villages into a district was introduced under the British colonial administration. Similarly the allocation of fiefs that have

more economic prospects may be determined by the influence or closeness of the *Chima* to the Shehu. The position of a *Chima* is not hereditary and such a fief allocated to a *Chima* can be re-allocated at any time in part or in whole to an existing or new *Chima*. Hence *Chima* at all times strived to remain loyal and committed to revenue generation as any insubordination or undue behaviour might lead the Shehu to take away a part or the whole of their fiefs and re-allocate them to others.

Since the *Chima Kura* was an absentee landlord residing at the capital or elsewhere due to the nature of his duty he has to appoint one or more representatives called *Chima Gana* to look after his fief. The *Chima Gana* may be in charge of a single village or group of villages and hence is regarded as an on-the-spot agent of the *Chima Kura*. The *Chima Gana* therefore, was vested with absolute authority of representing his superior in matters relating to the area of his jurisdiction.

The organization of the fief holding system contributed to the rapid dispersal and assimilation of the Gamergu population. A number of Gamergu settlements were founded during the time of the El-Kanemi period following the organization of the new political order. Under this system the Gamergu people were divided into three districts namely Dikwa, Bama and Uje. However, the area occupied by the Gamergu was further divided into seven fiefdoms. As mentioned earlier an area demarcated as a fief may not remain static nor a fief holder will continue to remain in control at all times since the Shehu may decide to alter the fief or the holder at anytime.

The fief system was different from the ward and village heads system (Bulama and Lawan) though they were later incorporated as part of the fief holding system in the 20th Century. The Kanuri political hierarchy, similarly provide the positions of the Bulama and Lawan at the ward and village levels respectively. In this organization the Bulama is the representative of the Lawan who heads a ward in a large village or a small village unit. The Lawan who is then subordinate to the District head is the head of a village or groups of villages designated as a Lawanate. Though the Lawan is under the District Head his appointment is made by the Shehu. In a district there are a number of villages headed by Lawans. The District Head (*Aja*) is then answerable to the Waziri and the Shehu. This system that came into existence in the 20th Century was different from the fief holding that has been in place even at the

times of the Sayfawa where the *Chima Gana* was directly answerable to the *Chima Kura*. There is no doubt that conflicts occurred between the office of the *Chima Gana* and that of the *Bulama* or *Lawan*, especially when it comes to collections of revenue. The fact that friction occurred between the *Chima Gana* and the *Bulama* or the *Lawan* does not mean that the *Chima Gana* exercises more power over them. Benisheikh (1983) states that the position of the *Chima Gana* having direct access and influence over the *Chima Kura* limits the extent to which a *Bulama* or *Lawan* could afford to contest the authority of the *Chima Gana*. The *Bulama* was therefore subordinate to the *Chima Gana*. However, the *Chima Gana's* primary function was to collect all taxes and dues accruing to the government in Kukawa but was also to organise labour, especially during the time of Rabeh. According to Barth (1857, 361, vol. II) the whole district of Ulo Kura belongs to the *Magira* (mother of the king) and the villages of Ibramri and Bashirori are under the district of the Mastrema as the *Chima Kura*. It is this source of conflict that made fief holders to incorporate the respective *Bulamas* and *Lawans* in their fiefs by nominating them as their representatives at later period of the El-Kanemi rule. The roles of the *Chima Gana* and those of the *Lawan* and *Bulama* were running parallel to each other but merged together at later time, probably for administrative convenience.

Similarly, the fact that fief system was used by the Borno rulers as means of assimilating the Gamergu people into Kanuri culture could be observed in the manner of establishment of slave settlements and towns in areas of Gamergu settlements for the general purpose of raising the population. The establishment of such settlements are referred to by the Kanuri as *kaliali*, where the Chima of Konduga, Abba Masta, for example, founded the settlements of Bazamri and Kabuiri during the reign of Shehu Umar (see Map 2). Harford confirmed this when he stated that

there were three brothers, Bazam, Majo and Momad
all of whom were slaves of Abba Masta (Harford,
NAK, 1927, 48).

The function of the slaves settled in the area was for farming where the proceeds go to the Chima in Konduga to meet his quarterly payment to the court in Kukawa.

Taxation and Conflicts in Administered Gamergu Polity

During the El-Kanemi period when the Kanuri leadership succeeded in absorbing most of the Gamergu population under the new political order they embarked on imposing heavy taxes on the pagan tribes. Barth describes the situation as

While the greater part of the Gamergu has been exterminated, the rest are heavily taxed, although the tribute which they have to deliver to the Sheikh himself consists, only in butter (Barth, 1857, 361, vol. II).

The Gamergu people who were considered as non-Muslims of Borno were required to pay the *jizya* tax. This form of special tribute had to be paid by every individual pagan in the territory of Borno in order for the Shehu to protect the population since they were now considered as a tolerated group in Borno. However, this was an illusion for most part of the El-Kanemi period where the Gamergu were raided frequently despite the taxation. Such tax imposed on the Gamergu and other non-Muslim people of Borno was considered to be higher than its equivalent of *Zakaat* paid by the Muslims. The *jizya* was paid in cash or slaves. The *Zakaat*, locally known as *sada'a*, according to Benisheikh (1983, 82) was merely reduced to a grain tax, which is a deviation from the Islamic form of *Zakaat* that includes *zahir* (visible) possessions and *batin* (hidden articles such as cash and merchandise) possessions. Hence *sada'a* that was imposed on farm produce of Muslims, in effect, was borne almost exclusively by the agricultural peasantry. Those Gamergu that have since in the 19th Century been converted to Islam fall under this category. However, the Chimas hardly distinguished between Gamergu Muslims from the non-Muslims. In effect some Gamergu people ended up paying double tax thereby could be said to be over-taxed. The individual Muslims consider the portion of the one tenth of the gross harvest for the *sada'a* as being forbidden to them by law, thereby exercising their obligation to give the share to the State. In effect every Muslim does not keep to himself the share of the one tenth which he considered to be *haram* for him to consume. Another form of tax that also affected the non-Muslims as well as the Muslims was a general one called the *hakki binamram*. This type of tax, according to Benisheikh (1983, 85) was on the notion of mutual contract between the government and the governed. The word *hakki* (tax or due) is derived from Arabic word *haqq*,

which denotes obligation. However, the Kanuri used the word to refer specifically to secular tax, which was collected in winter (*binām*). Hence the *hakki bināmram* is simply referred to as winter tax, which was obligatory on all the subjects for their protection by the Shehu against any external invaders and internal molestation. This form of tax was paid in cash, cowries, Maria Theresa Dollars (*gursu*), or woven cloth (*gabaga*). Although this tax was binding on all the subjects, irrespective of their source of income, some individuals such as the Islamic *Mallams*, the disabled as well as slaves were exempted. The rates varied from person to person and their geographical location that determines their agricultural productivity.

It is estimated that tax collections from the Gamergu farmers, given their active role in the production of food items in the region, was more than the normal one tenth of the produce. As we observed earlier such taxes were collected by the *Chima* and the *Bulama* in their respective localities. It is almost certain that given the relationship that existed between the Kanuri and the Gamergu that soldiers might have accompanied the tax collectors in the discharge of their duties; but we do know for certain that such arrangement existed during the time of Rabeh. This kind of arrangement has also been the source of conflicts, especially where the Kanuri *Chima* and *Bulama* inflate taxes to gain from such system by taking their own share before passing it on to the higher authority through the *Chima Kura* and finally to the Shehu. Many Gamergu people may have had to flee from their homes due to this unfavourable condition created by their Kanuri leaders. The Gamergu condition under such repressive leadership and the famine of the 19th century could be said to be the contributory factor for the Gamergu to adopt methods ranging from outright robbery to raids as sources of livelihood. The areas where such notorious activities were most frequent were Uje, Konduga and Muna. Such areas were suitable for robbery because their thick forest made it convenient for attacking travellers. Most of the victims of such activities were travellers from the markets of Mabani on their way to Dikwa and other places. The area was also frequented by Shuwa cattle herders that constituted a sizeable portion of the economy of Borno. In order to curtail the growing proportion of criminal activities along such routes establishment of more settlements were encouraged by the rulers of Borno. In the Konduga area for example, where such nefarious activity was at its peak, one Ibrahim Wadaima, an

influential Shuwa at the court of El-Kanemi in Kukawa built as many as seventy villages and peopled them with his slaves (Harford, NAK, 1927, 21).

The Borno rulers, therefore, decided to confront such activities that could cause economic instability of the region and even vested power on the Mai of Dikwa to execute and effectively deal with offenders since the areas where such robbery took place were under his district. Consequently, the Gamergu population in the area were under pressure and supervision of the Mai of Dikwa. We could say that the Mai of Dikwa, at that time was the only ruler, apart from the Shehu himself in Kukawa, vested with the powers of execution of criminals.

Despite these nefarious activities associated with the Gamergu a number of its population was engaged in legal economic activities, which contributed to the revenue generation process of Borno. Gamergu people were known to have attended markets in the region such as those in Uje, Dikwa, Mabani, where they were considered to have formed the majority of the population, especially during the period before the movement of the Kanuri capital to Maiduguri. Similarly they also provided services which included dyeing, weaving, carving and building. They were also known to have played a leading role in the production of cotton and in the dyeing industry. Most of the villages had their own dye pits and professional dyers. An example of a dyeing centre was Ishga Kewe where abandoned dye pits are discernable even though mainly buried in the soil. Thorny branches are placed on such abandoned pits that are visible as markers for animals and children not to fall inside. These pits are quite deep as an attempt made by the author in order to dig the soil to reach the bottom was not successful. The depth of each pit, according to the villagers, could be up to 2 to 3 metres as we were able to dig a depth of 1.5 metres before abandoning. The pits seem to be professionally constructed with the walls treated to prevent the absorption of the dyes. In addition to the cultivation of cotton, indigo was also grown in large quantities.

Because of its economic and agricultural potentials the region no doubt attracted Rabeh to establish his capital in Dikwa. Consequently, the region witnessed another stage of mass migration but this time by the Shuwa in order to be closer to Rabeh, who they consider as their tribesman and saviour from the Kanuri. Though the

Kanuri refer to Rabeh as a tyrant Gamergu people capitalised on their enmity with the Kanuri and quickly formed an alliance with the leadership of Rabeh. Rabeh's followers, especially the Shuwa, did not however distinguish the Gamergu from the Kanuri instead they were left on their own without support. There were a number of Gamergu villages in the Dikwa area that were completely taken over by the Shuwa, which shows that the Shuwa people did not treat the Gamergu differently from the Kanuri.

The Development of Gamergu Villages into Modern Urban Centres

Recent development of Gamergu settlements into modern urban centres of Borno was mainly centred around the city of Maiduguri. The area was known for its demographic concentration as a result of being a market centre and the settlements of Uje, Mabani and Muna. However, with the relocation of the Kanuri capital to the area Maiduguri was then transformed into a modern urban centre but at the same time maintaining its traditional Kanuri features. According to Seidensticker (1993, 197) colonial interference with the development of Yerwa (Maiduguri) in the 20th century appears to have been restricted mainly to insistence upon wider roads. The colonial administration therefore did not influence the manner in which the population is located in the town. Hence the town has maintained its occupational diversification and structure as distinctively related to that of urban Borno culture. A number of important Gamergu settlements were taken over by the Kanuri. This happened through gradual settlement of Kanuri people and at the same time most Gamergu population moved to other settlements to flee from the Kanuri incursions. Most of these centres that used to be major Gamergu settlements are today considered as Kanuri settlements. Those Gamergu people that remained in the settlements were assimilated into the Kanuri society and have since identified as Kanuri people. The villages today that fall into this category include Uje, Mabani, Muna and Gawa.

Maiduguri (Uje, Mabani and Muna)

When Kukawa was destroyed by Rabeh the Shehu had to look for a new capital after Rabeh was killed. The choice of Maiduguri as the new capital was supported by the colonial administrators in order for the Shehu to be closer to the British colonial

administration where they had built a fort at the time of their initial occupation of Borno. Hence the choice of Maiduguri as the capital of Borno brought about the merger of the Gamergu villages in the area such as Uje, Mabani, Muna and Alau under the control of the Borno leaders. The Gamergu in the area had no choice other than to co-habit with their enemy and gradually become assimilated into mainstream Kanuri culture. Maiduguri, of course, as could be observed today, is a Kanuri urban centre but with many other ethnic groups residing.

Uje and Mabani (see Map 1 above) were two important villages of the Gamergu with large commercial activities. Barth mentioned Uje as the chief province of the Gamergu, which played an important role in commerce in the region, having the largest market that took place every Wednesday. Because of its importance in the region the market was also walled. Mabani was another village referred to by Barth as a chief town of the Gamergu situated about 4 miles from Maiduguri and also endowed with great wealth and commercial activities. Muna is one of the historic settlements of the Gamergu, which Barth described as thickly populated but destroyed by the Fulbe, during their attack on Borno in the 19th Century. The Gamergu population in Muna then migrated to other settlements of Gamergu. However a new town of Muna was founded about 10km to the southwest of the former town and is today repopulated by the Kanuri and Shuwa people. Most of the Kanuri settlers were Gamergu people assimilated into the Kanuri and the present Bulama is a direct descendant of the Gamergu who founded the town. According to the Bulama his office was created during the time of Shehu Umar (in the mid 19th century) and a great number of inhabitants have adopted the teaching of Islam. There was a great deal of inter-marriage that took place among the Kanuri and Gamergu and it is said that Gamergu of comparatively pure stock moved to the margins of the district such as Dogumba and Jolo.

Gawa

Gawa was one of the settlements founded by one of the princes that supposedly left Yemen as a result of rebellion against their leader. It was Umma that settled near a hunter settlement that he later renamed it as Gawa and became the Mai. He was said have controlled a vast area and later his successor was killed by Shehu Laminu in the 1830s because he could not make his people abandon their pagan activities. During

the El-Kanemi period the leaders realised that Gawa was one of the villages where the Gamergu population was more active. Consequently the attention of the leadership was drawn toward regular attacks on the inhabitants of the area. The Kanuri succeeded in driving away the majority of the population that refused to succumb to the Borno leadership hence they moved to villages in the vicinity such as Dogumba, Jolo, etc. Those that stayed behind were converted to Islam and subsequently assimilated into Kanuri culture. The architecture and dress code of the people of modern Gawa is Kanuri. The Shehu took away all the musical instruments (drums, oboe, trumpet, etc.) of the slain Mai and installed his son. The Mai of Gawa's power was considerably reduced compared to that of Muna (before it was destroyed) and was closely monitored by the Shehu. Since the musical instruments were not in the possession of the Mai, his authority was considered low. For example, the trumpet, which signified authority, was not allowed at his palace. Consequently, the area was later divided into different districts in the early 20th century. Konduga and Bama were detached from Gawa while Dikwa was also separated from Mofio. Rabeh also came and conquered the Kanem Empire. The Mais of Gawa and Mofio were said to have supported Rabeh. Gawa was said to be one of the small chiefdoms that flourished along the shores of the Lake Chad, in the Logone area. Platte mentioned a number of such chiefdoms that flourished in the region but did not include Gawa in her list. Subsequently, Gawa was assimilated into Kanuri culture and today the people dissociate themselves from Gamergu identity. This resulted from threats by the Shehu in Maiduguri for them to leave paganism to Islam or face annihilation. It was part of Borno's policy to threaten such independent chiefdoms within the range of its Empire in order to convert them to Islam. Hence the village head was directed to make his followers to comply with the order. The village head observed that the people were forced to accept the conversion to Islam. Many Kanuri people were encouraged to move to the village to settle among them as a way of checking on them. Although the threat was real the conversion was gradual as people willingly comply to lay down their pagan rituals for Islamic teachings in order to benefit from association with the majority group. This resulted in gradual assimilation of the population into Kanuri culture.

CONCLUSION

Kanuri insurgence into Gamergu area as part of their territorial expansion led to instability in the region. Hence Gamergu people were destabilized and driven away from their settlements. This position of the Gamergu pushed them to assume aggressive posture towards the Kanuri people. The Gamergu continually attacked Kanuri settlements as a form of retaliation and defensive mechanism. However, after a prolonged instability in the region the Kanuri then succeeded in establishing political institutions in Gamergu settlements under the control of the Bornu Empire. As part of the political hierarchy Gamergu people were also appointed as village and ward heads. Political stability in the late 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries enabled the Gamergu to settle and identify with their cultural tradition. The next chapter will discuss how the Gamergu were able to create their identity despite political control of their settlements by the Kanuri thereby relegating them to mere subordinates.

CHAPTER SIX

GAMERGU IDENTITY: LIFE CYCLE AND INITIATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Gamergu lifecycle has undergone changes as a result of interaction with the Kanuri dominant group. The expansion of Kanuri society has led the Gamergu to adapt their social life to that of the Kanuri Islamic culture that survived total assimilation over decades of living as a frontier people. This chapter will therefore elucidate the aspects of Gamergu lifecycle in contemporary socio-political structures and those that also promote their identity. The information obtained in this chapter is mainly from oral sources and therefore cannot be ascertained as a true representation of the pre-Kanuri Gamergu culture. It is however, considered by the Gamergu as describing the nature of their society and their identity. The intention here is to establish “Gamergu-ness” as described by the Gamergu themselves, as portrayed in their daily activities. In order to find out about being a Gamergu it is important to enumerate the life cycle of a typical Gamergu person. The study of life cycle from birth to death will also portray and give details of the various activities associated with each stage of the development. Consequently we are going to describe the way and manner in which a woman prepares for the birth of her first child as well as how children of both sexes are brought up in the family and the community. In the process of bringing up the children to become independent members of the society there are certain stages that are an important part of the progression. A boy undergoes circumcision as part of the process of stepping into adulthood to lead his own life and that of his family. Similarly the girl is also trained to become a woman and eventually establishes her own family upon marriage. It is an important part of Gamergu tradition to celebrate the death of an elderly person since ancestors form part of their belief in ritual performance. In addition, the year round activities of the individuals, the family and the community are also portrayed according to their respective schedules in the Gamergu calendar.

The art of *boli* is another cultural practice of the Gamergu that we could say has been transformed into modern musical performance in Borno. An examination of the

tradition of spirit possession and *shila* musical performance will therefore enable us to understand its historical context among Gamergu women and in modern Borno.

GAMERGU LIFE CYCLE

Birth and Infancy

The birth of a child (*baghya agdare*) is always seen as a blessing and therefore welcomed by the family and members of the whole community since they believe that each person created is for a purpose. An elderly woman (Katale) narrated her experience of the birth of her first son. Katale was told that it is important for her first child to be delivered in her compound, where the father will also be readily available, especially if her mother or any close female relative would be available to look after her for some days before and after the birth. The presence of the female relation was to assist her with some domestic activities that could be considered to be hard labour for the expected mother to engage in. The woman was also handy in comforting her with the pain that she went through before and after the delivery. Given the nature of scattered Gamergu settlements in the past where for example a single family may be the only occupants of a hamlet the issue of presence of family relations during birth was highly necessary to them. However in the present dispensation where Gamergu settlements are more compact, help from the people is much more communal hence making it less likely for women to require the services of their parents during delivery. This has brought about a more common approach to post-natal nursing among the people where the mother receives more attention from both relatives and neighbours. She can now have experienced women readily available to help her. It is often seen as not entirely necessary for a woman to travel to her parents' village in order to deliver her second and subsequent child compared to the practice in the past where the woman has to travel short or long distance to her mother's compound to receive the necessary care. Nonetheless the birth of a child is still carried out in the traditional way since there is no access to modern hospitals and health centres in the rural areas. People have to travel to Local Government Headquarters for serious health conditions but child delivery is comfortably managed by the local midwives. There are however, certain Kanuri practices that have made their way into Gamergu tradition. Mixed settlement of both Kanuri and Gamergu people in the region has enabled cross cultural exchanges, particularly in this case, the use of Kanuri midwives by Gamergu people. There are also other ritual

ceremonies such as naming and marriage rites that one often finds Kanuri people presiding over in Gamergu settlements. Hence where the Kanuri people are involved, especially at the forefront, then Kanuri procedures are often employed without objection from the Gamergu. The importance attached to the birth of the first child at one's compound was for the child to have and to recognise his sense of identity with the family. The child's root must be traced to his birthplace because the placenta and the umbilical cord (considered the birth mark of individual identity) are buried within the compound of the parents. Consequently the placenta was buried in a deep pit at the centre of her room as Katala vividly remembered. Though this practice is still maintained in contemporary Gamergu society the influence of Kanuri tradition is visible in the manner by which the placenta is disposed of. Instead of burying it inside the bedroom the placenta is nowadays buried either in the toilet or in a hidden corner within the compound as is the practice among the Kanuri. Prayers were recited to thank the ancestors for safe delivery and protection of the newborn from evil. The umbilical cord (*zamba*) usually falls off before the naming ceremony and was also buried by the mother's water pot (*bəgama*) located by her room. The choice of burying the cord under the pot was to protect it from being eaten by insects. When the cord is left in the open for insects to destroy then it is believed that the baby would become sick. Consequently subsequent siblings of the first-born would identify their background to that of the birthplace of the eldest since the younger ones could be born somewhere else. However, in a situation where the mother could not have a full time woman to look after her then she would have to be taken to her mother's or any female relation a few days after the birth during which the placenta would have been buried in her compound. Upon going to the compound of her parents she lodged at her mother's room but one could preferably stay in a separate room if available within the compound so that her mother was always near her. Her mother attended to all her needs and she was not allowed to engage in any hard work. Katala's husband sent some provisions to them from time to time even though he was not under any compulsion before the birth. Nonetheless, he was expected to provide some food items as a gesture of appreciation to his in-laws as he was supposed to visit the compound as a mark of respect for the in-laws. When she was in labour a midwife (*thlə dthləya əgzərə* or *muksa ya*) was immediately invited to attend to her. Her mother would have been the midwife if she had the experience but most mothers prefer to invite a professional midwife in the community. A woman

becomes a midwife through apprenticeship under an experienced midwife even if it is through inheritance. It is necessary for an experienced midwife to deliver the baby when a young mother is giving birth for the first time. When the baby arrived safely the midwife sprayed a mouthful of water (*pasha*) on the baby in order to determine his health condition. The cord was cut and the baby cleaned (*baza*) with sand¹⁸ before handing to the mother for breastfeeding. However, in a situation where the delivery is prolonged then it is believed that the woman could have offended her husband. She would have to seek for his forgiveness. The husband will then utter his forgiveness by saying “if the baby is of my blood (*naddame*) I forgive you and deliver successfully”. The husband may also decide to loosen his trousers (*pala zawa*) to allow for successful delivery of the baby. A piece of potash and onion are tied together with a thread and hung on the door of the room. This is expected to scare away witches from entering the room since babies and their mothers (*vəla*) are considered to be more vulnerable to attack by witches. Katala had to attach an awl to her hair to protect her from people’s mischief as such an act was capable of harming her. Any other metal object that can be attached to the hair can also be used as substitute for the awl. The baby was also protected from such mischief and devil by placing a knife under his mat. Close relatives of the family that are considered experienced and the midwife witnessed the birth since other people are not allowed. Men are never allowed to witness a woman when in labour. The news of the birth is delivered to the father by one of his female kin who witnessed the birth. After the mother fed the baby then the midwife will take her and warm the child’s navel with a warm damp piece of cloth and used her bare hand to warm the other parts of the body. The head was also shaped in this way so as to make it into a normal form as the head might have been slightly squeezed in the process of delivery. The process of warming up the baby was taken over by Katala’s mother. It was done twice daily for the navel to heal faster and the baby kept warm. Glowing charcoal is always kept in the room to make it warm unless the weather is very warm. The newborn is referred to as *ndunde* irrespective of the baby’s sex. The ashes (*ukca*) from the cooking place and the bones (*khyekhye*) from the meat eaten by the mother are all disposed of on the day of the naming ceremony. Similarly, the cooking pots (*fəka bara, shiga*) used

¹⁸ Ordinary clean sand is used to rub the body in order to clean up any blood or liquid that is visible after birth. Water is not used to wash the baby at this stage because the baby is believed not to be strong enough to get wet.

by the mother are given to the midwife as a present. The husband is responsible for the feeding (*zərnga*). The mother always stays with the baby and makes sure that an adult is with the baby whenever she leaves the room. Whenever the mother leaves the room she would have to carry a hoe (*givəra*) if the baby is a girl and for a boy she holds a machete (*dalme*) or an axe in order to signify that the baby is being protected. In such circumstance it is believed that the jinn spirit cannot take the baby away. This is because the newborn, before the naming can be exchanged by a jinn spirit with a jinn baby. The parents may not realise this until at a later period when it is observed that the child's behaviour is abnormal. However, there is always an elderly woman with the mother, usually her mother or elder sister who has experience of handling babies to assist her in their early days. The new mother will remain in the room and will not engage in any hard work for about forty days. The midwife now engages the mother with certain conditions that she must meet in order to put in proper shape and health for future pregnancy and to maintain a normal health condition. These conditions include a special diet of cow leg, chicken pepper soup and vegetables which are referred to as *naza za* that the husband must always provide for the nursing mother (*vəla*). The mother that remains under such special diet will be able to regain her strength. She must also bath (*bara vəla*) in hot water on daily basis in order to get back to her normal body form. Because of the hotness of the water her mother helped her with the bath in the first week before she got used to it. After forty days of caring by her mother then the baby and her mother are left on their own to live a normal life. The woman that helped and stayed in the compound was compensated by the husband as a mark of appreciation for looking after his wife and child. The husband hence provides a new set of clothes and some foodstuff for the woman to take to her home. However, the woman would not depart without giving some advice to the mother on some necessary tasks that she must continue to do in order for both of them to remain in good health. Part of the advice would include the importance of bodily positions such as proper sitting positions, lying down and walking. She is also encouraged to drink warm water for a few months.

When twins are born the first to appear is regarded as the younger because of their belief that the elder one is wiser hence sends the younger one out of the womb to find out the condition outside (in the world). After a few minutes the elder one then appears since he must have spiritually received the response from the earlier younger

one. When the elder one dies then it is said that the condition reported to him by the younger one was not good. Consequently the Gamergu consider the birth of twins (*wulha*) a spiritual blessing but amidst speculations from amongst the families and the community. This is because of the belief that twins appear in a family for certain reasons that may be seen to bring happiness or misfortune to the members. Hence upon birth the parents will immediately invite a traditional fortune-teller called *aghye* (or *thlātaga ərva*) to enquire from the twins the purpose of their choice of the family. The process of consultation is referred to as *kava*. The fortune-teller then makes consultations and tells them the reason for the birth of the twins. This is done by transferring the spirits of the twins into a calabash of water for the fortune-teller to have direct access to them. He then exchanges word with the spirits to discover the purpose of their birth to the family. If the reason for their birth is seen to bring misfortune then he will advise the parents on what to do to please them. It is a strong belief among Gamergu that the birth of twins may be a form of check and balance in the family, especially between the parents. The father or mother in the household may either be cheating or causing harm to the other for no reason. It is in this kind of circumstance that when twins are born to such family that they intervened by punishing the wrong-doer through the use of supernatural powers that they possessed. The punishment may come in the form of loss of valuables or falling ill. But almost in most situations twins are seen to be bringing good fortune to their families. Though most traditions in the area believe in the supernatural power of twins their perception and manner of appearing in a family differ considerably, particularly the Kanuri, where they do not regard twins as form of check and balance for the family. Even though they have the power to release snakes and scorpions they do not use them on their parents. Hence the parents must always try to please and satisfy them as much as possible. The parents are expected to respect each other in order for the twins not to harm them. Whenever their parents annoy them or are not honest to each other then the twins have the power to make them fall sick. They recover from their illness when they realise their mistake and repent from it. The twins are easily annoyed by the slightest mistake even when unequal attention or clothing is given to them. In such circumstance both or one of them may decide to die but when the parents notice that they will then ask other twins to plead on their behalf so as not to die. In a situation where twins get angry then it is believed that only other twins can plead with them on behalf of the parents. Such pleading is seen

as a spiritual interaction between the two pairs of twins. If the twins are convinced then they will decide to live, otherwise they will die but the Gamergu will say that they have left for another woman's womb (*thathala*). That is why bodies of dead twins are each placed inside pots and buried at riverbanks or near a stream/pond. Twins are believed to have seven lives. They wear a kind of bracelets (*najahe*) to identify them and their sex and to protect them from evils.

Because the Gamergu accord great spiritual importance to the birth of twins a special celebration is organised to welcome them, which lasts for two weeks. The celebration referred to as *ja wulha* is accompanied by musical performance by women that starts immediately upon the birth of the twins. Women gather at the compound of the twins or at an open space to stage the performance. The ceremony is organised in such a way that people from other Gamergu communities could attend. The performance is staged by a group of women called *tho balalla wulha* that is specialised in the musical performance involving beating of calabashes. The women drummers beat their calabashes with songs of praise to the twins and their parents while the rest of the women will be singing and dancing to the tune of the music. The calabashes are each placed face down in another large calabash of water. The women dancers would wear rattle anklets to produce sound while dancing. The men that form part of the crowd spread money as mark of encouragement and support to the performers. The family of the twins prepare food for the dancers. People donate to the parents during the celebration. The celebration is repeated in the same manner after two years with the killing of two goats. The twins are expected to start walking during the second celebration. Visitors that come to see the twins are expected to present gifts in pairs. The mood of the people during the celebration is comparable to that of the death of an elder. This is because the birth of the twins is believed to be a blessing to the community comparable to the passing away of an aged man.

During the first week of the child's life relatives and close friends of the family come from far and near to see the newborn. They usually spend part of the afternoon in the compound teasing and cajoling the baby and her mother, especially commenting on whom the child resembles in the family. Twins are even more interesting for teasing but most women are very careful on the comments they pass on them and their

parents because they believe that the twins can react to any negative comments. Some of them are curious to know the outcome of the consultation with the fortune-teller so that they can know how to satisfy them during their visits.

Naming a Child (*Fa zire*)

The naming of a child is a very important part of the child's history and to the parents since names usually carry meanings or attach some affection to the families involved. Gamergu traditional ritual is maintained in naming a newborn up to present times. The tradition maintains the identity and sex of a child right from the birth. The general name referred to a baby at birth (*ndunde*) is followed immediately by a real name given to the child by his parents. Such names may refer to an animal, clan, and days of the week or certain occasions. They are an important part of the child's history since the name will describe his attachment to a particular person or thing. This form of naming a child is the one used by Gamergu people to determine a child's name on the day of birth or within three days. Gamergu popular names are given in the table below. However, after many decades of frontier life and interaction with the Kanuri, modern Gamergu people have adopted Kanuri Islamic values in the naming of their children. This practice has brought about the use of Islamic names and ceremonies that take place on the eighth day after the birth of a child. The ceremony is usually presided over by Islamic scholars. The Gamergu traditional form of real names is today relegated to mere cover names as a result of influence by Kanuri and Islamic form of names. Nevertheless Gamergu traditional names are still maintained and form part of modern Gamergu identity since it is used among the people to address each other. Some of the Islamic names are also used in a corrupt form such as *Ummate* for Muhammad just like the Kanuri use *Modu* in its place. The practice among Kanuri is also maintained in naming a child after one's parents, relations or friends. The traditional manner of carrying naming ceremonies among the Kanuri is also adopted by the Gamergu where people gather at the compound of the father shortly after dawn to conduct the naming.

Figure 9: Some Gamergu popular names and their meanings

Name	Gender	Meaning
Yaga	Male	First born
Katale	Female	First born
Manye	Male	Second born
Hyekwa	Female	Second born
Naga	Male	Third born
Gwaja	Female	Third born
Kwatsa	Female	Fourth born
Yagaraba	Male	Born on Wednesday
Katararaba	Female	Born on Wednesday
Nagalamise	Male	Born on Thursday
Gwajalamise	Female	Born on Thursday
Talake	Female	Born on Tuesday
Gwaigwai	Male	Spirit name
Matsapa	Male	Kind of snake
Gwajakiwa	Female	Crying girl
Nagakiwa	Male	Crying boy
Mbämme	Both	Sibling following twins
Muge	Both	Twin
əsəga	Both	Twin
Balla	Male	Only God can sustain him
Dthluma	Female	Born on Friday
Dugje	Male	Surviving child after mortality
Biye	Both	Passed through a hole
Nasare	Female	Last born (youngest)
Gwaə uhule	Male	Born while on a journey
Yagə uhule	Female	Born while on a journey
Patake	Male	Kind of bird
Hyakiwa	Both	Born the same day an elder died
Wumiri	Both	Born on festivity day
Katche	Female	Founder of mda katche clan

Tsakiwe		
Wayaware		

When the child is given a name then the general name *ndunde* may not frequently be used to address the baby. However, when a child is named after either of the parents' mother or father then they will not address the child with that name instead the cover name will be used to address him. The name of either parent's mother or father is not mentioned as a mark of respect. Some elderly peoples' names may not also be mentioned but a cover name will be used in place of the real name.

The baby's gender can easily be discerned on the appearance at this early age of one year because of the mother's interest in beautifying her according to the sex. Apart from the dress the facial features and hair-do of the baby are prepared in the style with the gender. Girls will have a hair-do whereby the head is shaved except for some hair left in three parts called *kojo*. This will then grow to a level that can be plaited into three parts called *ira gyale*. Girls receive more attention regarding the plaiting of the hair and applying make-ups on their faces to bring out the female features in them. The ears are also pierced for the baby girl to wear earrings. The boy's situation is different as his appearance remains simple and natural without any cosmetics other than the application of cream or oil on the body, especially during harmattan. Nevertheless he may at a later age have his hairstyle barbed.

From the age of about two to six years boys are referred to as *dawale cuka* whereas the girls are called *jale cuka*. The distinction between boys and girls become even more apparent at this period. The distinction in the sex begins with the weaning where girls are weaned at the age of two years but the boys stay for another six months. Though the traditional form of weaning among the people does not carry any gender preference and both sexes stay for equal period of breastfeeding, the present practice came about because of Islamic influence. In Muslim tradition the boys stay longer than the girls while breastfeeding. The period of weaning is difficult for both the mother and the baby. If the baby will remain in the compound during the weaning period then the mother usually applies henna or any bitter and unpleasant leaves on her breast in order to distract the baby's interest from them. Certain herbs

(which I am not able to identify) are obtained from herbalists that are given to babies in their food or drinks to help with the weaning by discouraging them from sucking the breast. In some cases the mother can apply *henna* to her breast in order to scare the child from the dirt or the bitterness of the substance upon taste. However, the easiest is for the baby to go to her grandmother or any elder relation away from the compound or village for a certain period of time when the baby is expected to have forgotten about breast feeding. During the age of 2-4 years children are attached to their parents and close relatives to care and provide for them. This is because Gamergu tradition regards them as needing parental care as much as possible in order to set example for good behaviour. In addition to the parental care the child is given some amulets to wear in order to protect him from illness and evils such as witchcraft and as a cure for certain sicknesses. There is a strong belief among the Gamergu that witchcraft is very rampant and that children are among the most vulnerable hence must be protected. Such amulets (*tadiya*) are obtained from a fortune-teller (*aghye*) and nowadays also from Islamic scholars and are tied around the child's waist or worn as pendants around the neck. The amulets contain herbs as well as certain parts of animals where as the case of those given by Islamic scholars usually includes Quranic verses. The ones prepared by Islamic scholars (*laya*) have their origin from the Islamised Kanuri tradition. It is a popular form of local charm for treatment and prevention of different diseases and sorcery. Some illnesses that are part of the child's growth are also prevented or limited by the use of charms. Such charms are obtained from a traditional herbalist while some of the concoctions are prepared by the parents. There is a general knowledge of medicinal herbs by most elders of the community, which enables them to provide the protection needed in the families. Common illness resulting from teething, for example, is prevented from getting severe by wearing an amulet. There are certain contemporary illnesses that continue to receive traditional medicine, especially in areas that are not in close proximity to modern health care amenities. Very common diseases such as measles, chicken pox, small pox and fever are also treated locally though in most cases without much success. Measles in particular are treated by applying the juice from pounded onions to the eyes and nostrils where the child then inhales it. This process is done on a daily basis until the child is cured. Cow butter in liquid form is also given to a child suffering from small pox through the nose. This process is also carried out on a daily basis up to the time when he is cured. In the case of chicken pox the treatment is

simple and very effective where the child drinks porridge which contains mixture of food scrapings, buttered milk and garlic. A child with measles and small pox is laid on moist sand under a ventilated shade to keep him cool just like the one that suffers from fever. Polio is a condition that is in most cases attributed to spirit or jinn attack which are believed to have been cured through consultation with traditional herbalists and fortune-tellers.

However, children spent a lot of their time associating with age-mates (*kalama*) during the last two years of this *dawale* stage. The theme of most of their games is mainly imitation of adult activities, which also keep them in groups. The scene of any sort of play is the *ungva*, a large open space in front of the house of the community head or that of the head of the clan. Though both boys and girls tend to play separately they do come together from time to time to play in groups. Though the boys help their fathers and male adult relatives in their occupations such as farming and hunting they spend most of their time playing games. The girls on the other hand engage in women's activities like cooking, child rearing and they play roles of husband/wife and children. Among the games played by boys are hide and seek (*shabe*), range throwing, running and shooting with catapults, snail shell game (*bahya kyagwa*, folktales (*bala naguranze diya*) etc. These are activities that are associated with boys from as early as four years old. In the hide and seek game the boys divide into two groups, for example A and B. Group A nominates one person to hide for those of group B to find and touch him. Members of group A will try to divert those of group B from any lead that will get to the hidden boy. When it is announced for the game to start then the hidden boy will find his way to the starting point without being touched by those of the other group. Points are given by the number of times an opponent detects and touches the hidden boy. At the end of the game the points obtained are counted and the winner announced. In range throwing a group of boys will each throw a stone as far as they can so that the furthest to throw wins the game. Killing birds with catapult is another of the boys' activities where they look for birds from tree to tree usually within the village. The girls at this stage, however, follow their elder sisters to their performance and in some cases participate in plays that involve singing or games that represents family issues. An example of one of such game is that of imitating a grandmother and her grandchildren called *tada mbegwa*. The girls will divide themselves into two and then are seated in two

rows opposite each other. Group one will represent a mother and her children whereas group two will act as the grandmother and her pumpkins. The mother then sends one of the children to go and pick a pumpkin from the grandmother. When the girl goes to pick the pumpkin the grandmother will shout at her and chase her away. She then returns to her mother crying. The mother will ask her why she was crying. She will tell her that her grandmother scared her away, and then the mother and the girl will go back together to the grandmother. The grandmother also gives her reason and allows her to go to the backyard and pick the pumpkin, meaning the last girl in the row. She has to be strong enough before she pulls out the last girl who acts as a pumpkin. This is because the children acting for the pumpkins will hold themselves tightly to each other's waist that makes it difficult to separate them. If she succeeds in taking the 'pumpkin' then she joins her mother in the other group with the pumpkin. In this process the mother's children will grow in number or otherwise the grandmother's group will also do the same thing. Whoever gets the most of the other's group members wins the game. These types of games and activities, according to Gamergu elders, keep the children busy and distance them from things that are not allowed in the society, especially with the growing anti-social behaviour among young children. Gamergu elders further described this form of training as one of the main differentiating factor from those children of urban areas where anti-social behaviour is on the increase. At the same time they begin to mimic the activities associated with their sex and to show their understanding of their roles as they grow up. For example, the use of catapult to hunt for birds indicates that boys are leaning toward men's occupation of hunting and both girls and the boys know their roles of husband and wife as well as that of a family life when they reach that stage. It also gives them a sense of responsibility and respect from that age that makes them identify with their elders more effectively. This is a unique situation where most children do not go to school so that they can spend their time in playing games and activities that help them understand their society rather than engaging in unlawful activities. Similarly the parents feel contented when they see the children engage in such activities as it will encourage a sense of unity among the children and their parents and also enable the parents to concentrate on their work without disruption from the children.

The period between 7-16 years of the life cycle is considered to be a transition period from childhood to adulthood but more importantly regarded as the most dramatic stage for both sexes. Even though there is some form of restriction for the girls the first 5 years of this period also draws both sexes much closer and they engage in teasing play called *bathla*. Both boys and girls look forward to this stage of their development with mixed feelings. The boys (*agzare dawale*) are looking forward to their circumcision because it gives them the feeling of being respected and becoming a 'man'. Circumcision is seen by the boys as a platform for becoming an adult even though there is the fear of experiencing pain. However, the girls (*agze jale*) even have more mixed feelings than the boys because of more responsibility and restriction at this period. This is the period when girls are restricted in associating with other people and mainly engage in domestic activities. Even though the girls cherish the domestic works so much but the fear of leaving their parents as a result of marriage stays in their minds. Domestic work is seen as the platform to womanhood as she is aware that it is part of the training and the marriage may take place anytime from the age of 13 years. They are expected to dress decently when going out of the compound. They are fully engaged in household activities, especially cooking, fetching water and keeping the compound clean, which are considered female duties. These duties are carried on from the traditional context and continue in modern times. It is at this age that girls are expected to learn all the domestic work so that they can relieve their mothers and prepare for their own home after marriage. A girl that is proposed for marriage is even shy among her mates and tries to be well composed in order to please her suitor and his relatives as described below. There is another important play for the girls near to their puberty. They engage themselves in cooking competition (*dāya gya dafa*). Each girl will collect foodstuffs and ingredients from her mother. The competition takes place at an open place by the village head's compound (*ungva*) where each girl is expected to cook a delicious meal. The meals are then tested by both adult and young men who would encourage the girls by admitting that their meals are delicious (*amtaka dafa manyina*).

Circumcision – *Dim Shidikwe*

Circumcision is a recent introduction to Gamergu following their acceptance of Islamic religion. Though most Gamergu elders try to keep their past practice secret,

some of them however, confirmed that they did not circumcise their boys in the past. It has become a traditional feature among modern Gamergu people to circumcise their boys. It is considered by the Gamergu as portraying their Islamic identity in modern times of frontier society but more importantly it also forms part of their ritual to elevate the boys to a higher level of their developmental stage. At the age of seven years the boy is ready for circumcision. A boy is recommended for circumcision in Islamic tradition any time between one week of birth to the age of seven years but the practice among the Kanuri is carried out at the age of seven years, which is the one also used by the Gamergu. Every boy is looking out for this period because it forms an important part of his life and his status in the society. The term *dim shidikwe* literally means entering the shade, which interestingly has no literal link to the Kanuri word *kaja*. We can say that the Gamergu have used the term to form and link it up to a stage in their lifecycle. This referred to the circumcision because the children are all kept in seclusion in a room from the day of their circumcision to the time they are healed. Indeed this will be interpreted to mean that the child is about to enter into a new stage of development and status in the society. The status of transition from childhood to adulthood but not entirely identified with adulthood. The child is certainly given recognition of self-independence in order to prove to be an active and courageous individual in the society through participation in male activities and occupations. Apart from the seclusion during the healing period the child also experiences pain for the first time as part of the initiation process. The pain resulting from the circumcision makes the child have feelings of superiority over those that are not circumcised. In addition, children that are circumcised tend to be respected more among their peers, especially by the opposite sex. That is why as part of the initiation they are advised not to appear naked in the presence of girls with the exception of elderly women and their parents. Indeed this is a great advancement for the boys as they develop a feeling of manhood, which is portrayed in the feeling of shiness and restriction when naked. In other words one of the characteristics of becoming an adult is the stage of circumcision. The circumcision takes place once a year in each community involving children between the ages of seven to nine. Thus they are strongly advised by the elders to associate themselves with their male counterparts and activities related to their sex. Hence children from this stage will begin to associate themselves with the occupation of their fathers and adult male relatives so that they can learn to work like men. Consequently boys will tilt towards

men's occupation like farming, fishing, etc. This will prepare them to easily step to adulthood without being controlled by women and their activities. Similarly the boys tend to help their fathers and male relations in renovation of the compounds and preparation of materials. The circumcision is an important event for the families and the community because it is an event that brings together people from the community and outside in order to celebrate with the boys and their relatives since it is conducted annually. On the night before the circumcision people gather from different villages to celebrate the occasion. There is drumming and singing in order to mark the event and rejoice with the boys during their happy moment for the circumcision. The boys, on the other hand, also feel honoured with such gathering and celebration staged on their behalf. The occasion is also used by the families of the boys for collection of contributions from the people. The contributions made are used by the families to facilitate the circumcision activities and provide the boys with their needs. It is the boys' prerogative to receive from their families what they wanted during the period of circumcision until they are completely healed. The boys are brought into a single room, which is provided for this purpose on the eve of the circumcision. In the early morning the boys are circumcised one after the other by a barber specialised in circumcision who is normally Kanuri. Women are prevented from watching the circumcision but male relatives of the boys are allowed to watch and assist in holding them up. No boy is circumcised in the presence of another of those to be circumcised. The trick of the barber is to make the boy to believe that he will not be cut and there will not be any pain while he is holding the penis. Hence in the process of convincing the boy the barber then conceals his blade and cuts off the skin quickly. Sometimes when the boys are many the head of the barbers will ask some of his colleagues to assist in the circumcision. During the period of healing the boys are restricted to their room with their male relatives keeping watch and making sure that they do what is expected of them as part of the healing. For example, they must warm their wounds with glowing charcoal for two to three times each day. Only women relatives of the boys are allowed to see them during this period. The circumcision takes place during the cold season because wounds heal faster during that time and there is enough time for such activity during the season. Children eat delicious meals at this time like chicken pepper soup which is expected to hasten the healing process.

After the wounds are healed the boys can now appear in public each carrying a decorated stick (staff), which symbolizes their status as newly circumcised. The stick is decorated with strings of different colours by the boys. The stick is an important symbol of their initiation that also enables them to portray their new image to the opposite sex (women). In this regard they stop women passers-by to request gifts by placing the stick on their way. This is usually done on market days when many women attend markets. It is taboo for a woman to cross over the stick hence she makes a donation for the stick to be removed on her way. Although this is a form of begging it is not the same as those children that attend Quranic schools and spend their time begging on the streets. This type of money collected by those circumcised are limited to that period only and the children will continue with their normal life after a few weeks of the healing period.

Figure 10: Gamergu Life Cycle

Age range	Male	Female
0-2 years	<i>Ndunde</i> Naming ceremony takes place on the eighth day and the child is protected from sickness and the devil by use of charms.	<i>Ndunde</i> In addition to naming and use of charm the girl's hair is made into three parts which grows to a level that can be plaited
2-6 years	<i>Dawale cuka</i> Play games and tend to be close to their elder siblings.	<i>Jale cuka</i> Play games and stay close to their mothers.
7-16 yeas.	<i>əgzərə dawale</i> Form into groups and play games. Circumcision takes place between 7-9 years of age. Farming and herding.	<i>əgzə jale</i> Girl learns to fetch water, firewood and cook. From the age of 13 years she is ready for marriage.
17 – 20 years	<i>Dawale</i> More of farming and herding on his own and beginning to feel like a man. He undergoes <i>vale</i> initiation after making	<i>Dawajire</i> Learns to be a woman, engages in cooking and looking after her children. A few young women get married late at this stage.

	consultation for <i>kyarva</i> . He can also get married as early as at the age of 19-20 years.	
21- 50 years	<i>Jile</i> Becomes an adult and gets married with children. Looks after his family and inculcates good habit in his children. He takes part in community activities and decisions and learns to develop fame with the community.	<i>Mukse</i> She becomes a full housewife and mother. Looks after the children and the domestic activity. She becomes active in the community amongst her women folk i.e. participates fully in marriages, naming, etc.
50 and above	<i>amjigwe jile</i> He becomes a member of the elders committee. Does not engage in hard work but his children provide him with his needs. He gives advice to the community leader and to young men and women in the family. He becomes a story-teller in the family and the community because of his knowledge. He participates fully in community discussions and decision making that touches on the community generally.	<i>amjigwe jile</i> Stays at home and looks after her grandchildren. She jokes with them and narrates stories to them. They become midwives or give advice to young women on child upbringing.

Adolescence (*Dawale/Dawajire*)

This is a stage of the lifecycle that we can say the Gamergu have fairly continued with their traditional practice where the boy undergoes complete transition to adulthood but it is different for the girls since they must have married and borne children. The traditional ritual that takes place is not influenced by the Kanuri but remains part of making the young adult identify with Gamergu-ness. This stage is of great importance since it marks the transition into adulthood and married life. It is the period that determines the readiness of the young adult for more independent married

life. In order to scale this period rituals are performed, especially for the boys to facilitate the transition. The boy (*dawale*) at this stage feels like an adult and begins to search for independent occupation that will generate some income for him beside the family farming activity. He goes hunting or other forms of independent occupation such as fishing that will enable him get money to cater for certain expenses outside the family. The young adult male can get married from the age of 19-20 years old. But some of the young men get married at a later age of about 22 years old during the period of *jile*. There is an individual initiation during this stage to finalise the entry to adulthood. The initiation called *vale* is conducted when the child becomes ill. It is expected of each child that reaches this period to fall sick. The sick *dawale* then consults a native fortune-teller called *əghye* to confirm the nature of the sickness. The consultation is referred to as *kyarva*. The fortune-teller then instructs the child to sacrifice a chicken in order to become a full-fledged *dawale* that is ready to get married. The *dawale* then kills a fowl and gathers his age mates to eat it. If this is not done then he is not expected to recover from the sickness hence cannot marry to lead an adult life. He is expected to help his parents-in-law with their farming and sometimes even invite his friends to assist him on the farm. He must contribute labour for a certain period before the girl's parents will consent to the marriage.

The girl at the stage of *əgzejale* can start a married life as early from 13 years old. As a young wife that takes residence at the compound of her husband located within his parent's household, she receives the necessary advice and assistance from her mother-in-law. It is possible that she may be a co-wife, hence would be advised to respect the status. The new wife's responsibility depends on the nature of the compound composition as to whether she is a co-wife or the only wife that either lives in her/their own compound or shares the same compound with her husband's parents. In any given situation that involves sharing of the compound it is then important to identify and respect the division of labour in the household. Since Gamergu women in most cases move to their husband's compound upon marriage and live in an extended family compound the wife may inevitably have more responsibility as a result of helping her mother-in-law. Similarly if the newly married wife lives with one or more co-wives then the domestic work is shared among them with each one taking turns on either daily basis or for two consecutive days

depending on the husband's choice. For example, cooking, sweeping of the compound and fetching water are done by each wife on a shift basis on each one's turn. In some situations the works are carried out collectively by the women when there is understanding among them and they are cordial. Some women also help execute the duties of their co-wives, especially when they are away or not in good health, but not many women would be able to do that. The women can also assist their mothers-in-law with domestic work, particularly when they are elderly except for collecting leaves from the bush that every woman is expected to do by herself. In rare circumstances where a young woman lives with an elderly co-wife then she may relieve her of some domestic responsibility such as sweeping and cooking. Nevertheless this is a difficult task that hardly any women would be willing to undertake.

As the woman moves from this stage through *dawajire* to *mukse* she takes the responsibility of looking after her children. In addition to the domestic responsibility the woman is expected to do certain series of work that may be seasonal. During the *viya* rainy season just about when the fields are cleared for farming the women will cook for the men. When they take the food to the field then they are expected to collect firewood on their way back home. Each time they go to the field they collect firewood and it is woman's pride to have piles of firewood (*dalke*) in her compound that will last her for the year (see fig. 11 below). This is a common activity among Gamergu women that is still maintained in modern times. In this way women would keep a large stock of firewood that is exclusively their responsibility. Women also engage in collecting vegetables/leaves that grow in the wild during the rainy season for cooking. This is a responsibility that they must do so that they can dry and store enough that can also be used during the dry season when such products become scarce or expensive. They collect these products on their way home whenever they go to farm. They also collect brooms that grow wild that are used for sweeping compounds. It is also the responsibility of women to cut and gather the corn heads (guinea corn, millet or maize) in *dāla* (piles) that will be ready for threshing by men. Added to all these responsibilities is also for the women to squeeze in time to work on their own farms.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 11: Pile of firewood (*Dalke*)

The girl from the stage of *agzerjale* when she is married at about the age of 13 years through *dawajire* to *mukse* at the age of up to 50 years is engaged in a series of activities that is pertinent to her status as a woman. It is her responsibility to carry out certain responsibility in order to keep and maintain the family, household and the community. The role of the woman as a mother, mother-in-law and possibly as a grandmother, is part of an inevitable progression that takes place during the lifecycle. The woman by nature and in Gamergu tradition is responsible for looking after her children. It is her responsibility to organise activities in the compound and entertain visitors. She also gives advice to the head of the family on issues related to family members and relations. Both *dawajire* and *mukse* have now assumed a position of womanhood in the community and therefore become members of decision-making group. They can now participate in ceremonies such as wedding, naming, etc. representing their families in all women's activities.

Gamergu Marriage

Marriage (*nikka / gamukse*) is considered a major event in Gamergu tradition that is expected to bond relations and create families and households in contrast to the death of young people that breaks families and household. Because of its importance the

dry season (*kaya*) is mainly dedicated to marriage ceremonies. Similarly each community arranges marriage ceremonies in such a way that there is one ceremony at a time to enable full participation of its members. Consequently there is only one marriage in a particular clan or community at a given time and with enough time in advance so that members do not divide themselves as to which ceremony to attend. In this way the families of both the bride and the groom will receive full assistance and donations called *nzayewe* that is vital for the ceremony. However, marriage ceremonies cease during *madare*, which is the period set aside for compound constructions, clearing of farmlands and rituals ahead of the rainy season farming.

The choice of a partner among the Gamergu must come from outside one's clan since it is a taboo to marry from one's own clan. This form of marriage arrangement is different from the Kanuri or Wodaabe peoples where the Wodaabe, for example, marry only those that belong to the same clan (Stenning 1994, 46). That is why Gamergu men travel to settlements other than their own to look for wives, since the nature of clan distributions in the society are based on communal affiliation. Most of the Gamergu settlements were founded by different clan groups that made each community to have such clans in the majority. Each settlement is known to have a number of clans that do not marry from amongst the clans that were considered to be the founders of the settlement. Hence each settlement is seen to be the domicile of a certain group of clans where the people would have to look for wives from other villages that have different clan groups. For example, all the clans that are considered to be the founders of Ishga Kewe (*mda katche*, *mda ali*, *mda gwala*, *mda hyeuzare* and *mda nema*) will not marry amongst themselves but will have to look for wives in any other villages such Dogumba, Iza Garu, Kejeri, etc. similarly the clans of Iza Garu are not allowed to marry from any of the clans in the village but can get their wives from clans that are associated with the other Gamergu settlements. It is also not the practice among Gamergu people to marry cross-cousins as is allowed in Kanuri culture (Cohen 1961, 1235; Ellison, 1936, 526). These practices are considered taboo and can cause infertility among couples and may also lead to death. It is totally prohibited hence elders, especially the heads of clans could punish defaulters by forcing them to go into exile. Sororate marriage is additionally not practiced by the Gamergu but that of levirate marriage is very much favoured. Marrying the widow of one's brother or first cousin is valued among the Gamergu

people. When a man finds his choice of partner to marry then he will take residence (*gwara*) at the girl's compound in order to contribute labour during farming.¹⁹ This enables the man to come in direct contact with the girls' family and forms an important stage of courtship. This is in contrast to that of Kanuri courtship where intermediaries are used in the exchange of gifts and greetings (Cohen, 1961, 1238). Even though the man has taken residence at the girl's compound (*gwara*) contact between them is restricted to exchange of greetings and meetings in the presence of family members. The period of courtship/labour then results in (*rapt*) seizure of the girl by him. The man can seek the assistance of his friends to facilitate the seizure, which meant taking her to his village. At the time when both parents become aware of the situation and establish facts on the nature of taking the girl then an arrangement is made to formalise the union. Sometimes the period of courtship and labour does not take place, especially where a man seizes another person's wife, which has been known to exist in Gamergu tradition. In such instance the courageous ones whose wives were stolen fight to get them back. However, this method of taking possession of a wife has now discontinued because of urbanisation and pressure by the ruling Kanuri society.²⁰

Bride-price

The bride-price forms an important part of the marriage even though the man has already taken possession of the girl. This involves two stages of payment with the first given to the bride by the groom in the form of an animal (preferably sheep). The second payment, composed of a cow and 30 Maria Theresa Dollars is given at the same time by the groom's father to the bride's parents.²¹ The presentation made by the groom is considered the dowry, which is not refundable. However, that presented by the groom's father is refundable and at the same time symbolises the total possession of the bride by the groom's family. Since the bride moves to the groom's family compound upon marriage then she will continue to remain there even in the

¹⁹ Though Barkindo is of the view that the farm labour forms part of the dowry (Barkindo 1989,36) my findings indicated that in modern practice it is considered as part of courtship gift, similar to the Kanuri courtship.

²⁰ As part of the pressure to Islamise the Gamergu people series of meeting (on the directive from the Shehu's Place and carried out by the village head of Gawa) were conducted between some Gamergu communities in Gawa area and representative from Maiduguri where it was decided that any Gamergu person that engages in pagan activity would be fined 1000 shillings or a jail term of 7 years.

²¹ Some iron rods are included in the bride-price, according to Barkindo (1989, 36).

event of the marriage being broken then her position would have to be determined. This is because a woman, upon marriage, belongs to the husband's patrilocal family even when the husband dies. It is in this circumstance that levirate form of marriage is arranged for the brother or cousin of the deceased to inherit his widow.²² In a situation where there is no one to inherit the wife or they do not want to do so then the husband's family can marry her to another person outside the family in order to recover the bride-price. The widow's parents can, however, refund the bride-price so as to get their daughter back. Contributions, mainly of objects, from family members and friends form part of the bride-wealth (see fig. 12 below) that she uses for room decoration (Cyffer et al 1998)²³. This collection and some other form of gifts from the groom remain the property of the bride and will not be refunded in the event of separation between the two. That notwithstanding the bride can sell her property in order to liberate her status from the custody of her husband's family if her parents could not afford to do it on her behalf.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 12: A typical Gamergu woman's room

²² The inheritance by an eldest son of his father's wives with the exception of his mother as stated by Barkindo (1989, 37) could not be ascertained.

²³ Please refer to this publication for detailed information on Gamergu room decoration.

The Marriage ceremony

Gamergu marriage was never lavishly celebrated compared to the celebrations for birth of twins and the death of an elderly person. However, as a result of Kanuri influence Gamergu marriage is nowadays celebrated with some degree of similarity to that of Kanuri culture. In this regard certain practices carried out during Kanuri marriage have found their way into Gamergu marriage rite. Today a Gamergu person will declare his intent²⁴ to both families, which is followed by exchange of gifts. The bride-price for Gamergu marriage is fixed whereas that of Kanuri can be bargained and involved series of payment (e.g. *kororam*, *luwariram*, *sadagə*, etc.) that depends on status and affordability (Gazali, et al, 1998; Cohen 1967, 25; Ellison, 1936, 527). The ceremony itself has become more festive culminating on the marriage day with gathering of relatives and well-wishers to witness and formalise the union. The celebration continues at the residence of the couples with their initiation into a prosperous married life by performing an important function called *ufukfuwe* (which in Kanuri is called *kalawa*; Ellison, 1936, 531: *kalaba*). A bottle of oil is buried at the couple's door with each mother washing her son's/daughter's hand over it to cleanse their children of any evil. Then their right hands are rubbed with the oil. The husband receives a handful of food three times from his mother, which he transfers to his wife's. The food is placed in the bottle and buried while their hands are washed. The father presents his son with an axe while the mother presents her daughter with jewellery to usher in strength and agility in whatever they will possess.²⁵ Finally henna is applied to their hands. Even though this initiation has no Islamic background and is modified by the Gamergu, indeed there is no doubt that it came from Kanuri tradition.

Adulthood

A man (*zile*) between the ages of 21 to 50 years is regarded as a fully-grown adult who is responsible and can be trusted by other members of the community for his advice and guidance. However, the level of responsibility and trust differs within the age range as one becomes older then the level goes up. Attendance in modern

²⁴ This is similar to the Kanuri payment of *kororam* "asking money" to declare the intent (Cohen 1967, 25; Imam 1969,512).

²⁵ The whole process of burying the bottle to presentation by the parents is not practiced in Kanuri marriage even though henna is used.

schools does not inhibit marriage rites though some men may delay or even marry from outside the Gamergu community. At this stage of the life cycle he may have his own family and may be part of his father's household. In this case he will work with the household members in order to maintain the relationship that is also extended to the *umarashere* farmstead practice. He may at certain stage become the household head as a result of vacuum created by the death of his father or having moved away from the father's residence to take up his own residence and farmstead practice. The responsibility of the head is vast and cuts across the whole family, clan and the community. The man is the head of the decision-making in the household and therefore exercises his power by taking the final decision on any issue that affects the members. Men in general are responsible for activities on the family farm ranging from clearing of the field to harvesting and storage. The clearing of the field is an exclusive work of the men with the boys assisting. However, sowing and ploughing of the farm are done by both men and women without any clear distinction of labour. On the first day of the sowing the household head is expected to perform certain ritual in order to usher in a prosperous farming. The head will make a small furrow with a hoe and then pray by saying "*a gansega Ala²⁶ nazu manzawe am thleramina*" (may God protect us from all bad things throughout our work). Then the other members will be free to work on the farm at any time even before the head. Similarly when the product is ready for harvesting then the head will also offer prayers by tasting the crop and saying "*naza bazai kumbili ektena am shifa heya yaza baka*" (a new crop with good taste that even by next year at this time I will eat it). The men are also engaged in the cutting of the stalk when harvesting so that the women can easily cut off the head and gather them for threshing which is then the work of men. Threshing is sometimes carried out with communal effort, especially when the produce is large. The men also carry the corn to the compound for use and storage. In the rainy season men are also engaged in hunting (*kamba*) and fishing at a lower scale in addition to farming activity. The hunting usually involves the killing of monitor lizards, guinea fowl, rabbits and squirrel that are found within the vicinity of the village and farmlands. Fishing on the other hand is carried out in areas where rivers are found and mostly involves the use of traps. The men are responsible for the collection of grass for their donkeys and horses that are usually kept at home.

²⁶ The use of the term *Allah* in the Islamic context is used by the Gamergu in place of their term for god '*dadamiya*' because of influence of Islam on the people.

In the dry season (*kaya*) the men collect building materials that are required for repairs and construction of compounds. The collection of building materials will involve the cutting down of tree branches and shrubs. Clay for construction is also prepared during this time. However, the actual building starts in the *madare* period shortly before the rainy season when marriages also cease.

The man as the head of the family also takes care of the family and inculcates good habits among the members of the family, especially the children and becomes active in communal gatherings. From the age of forty men participate in minor community decision-making and learn to develop fame with the community. Nonetheless a man at this age must undergo *kyarva* – that is the consultation of the priest after falling sick before being admitted into the decision-making group. The sickness comes just like normal ones and when the man realises that he then consults the priest, though in some cases it is his friend or family that will advise him to seek *kyarva* when they notice any deterioration in his health. The priest will advise him if it is the time for the initiation, which must be conducted in order for him to recover from the sickness. This involved the killing of a bull by the person so as to perform the initiation. It is important to note that male initiation among the Gamergu is a unique feature that is considered significant part of the life cycle. We have observed in the earlier boy's initiation into adolescence that he will become sick in order to move to the next stage. Similarly the *zile* at the age of about forty is expected to be initiated to a higher hierarchy of decision making that culminates with the killing of a bigger animal compared to the boy's initiation. Women (*mukse*) on the other hand become full housewives and mothers looking after their children and domestic activities. They become active participants in the community amongst their womenfolk, especially during marriages and other forms of ceremonies involving women's participation.

Old age /elder (*əmjigwe*)

From the age of 50 years a man (*əmjiwe jile*) becomes a member of the elders' committee that is vested with the power of making decisions and passing judgements on major issues. The elders' committee is headed by the chief priest of the community. The committee nowadays includes its members among the political head

of the community who is appointed by the Shehu. He may, however, be below the age of 50 years but is admitted by virtue of his political position. The elderly do not engage in hard work such as farming since their children and grandchildren cater for their needs. They give advice to members of the family and the community and become storytellers because of their knowledge. They lead traditional ceremonies such as wedding, naming, and initiation and also represent their families during the annual ritual gathering. It is with this status that when the elderly person dies he is accorded the burial ceremony of becoming and representing the ancestors. Women at this age (*əmjiwe mukse*) remain in their compound and are attended to by their children and grandchildren. They are considered among the most vulnerable; hence they limit themselves to minor work such as making threads and selling small items. They become story-tellers and give advice to young wedded girls on how they should behave and be responsible wives.

Death (*əmsta*)

The death (*əmsta*) of a young person or young adult in Gamergu tradition is considered to cause separation or destruction of the family. Nevertheless the death of an elderly man is always received with joy and happiness because of their belief in ancestor worship. If the death occurred at night the corpse (*thlamtsa*) is massaged and laid on wooden mortars to avoid touching the ground until it is buried the following morning. This procedure is conducted because of the belief that the dead body will rot away if it touches the ground at night. The body is therefore washed in a calabash of water (*fəka baranura*) by the deceased's relatives (*thləvuwe*) before laying it on the mortars. The calabash is then kept facedown until the third day when it is turned up to indicate that the corpse has decayed in the grave. This is referred to as *wurafuka*. The body of a man is taken out of the compound through the normal door but that of a woman is taken over the fence (*ankya ərəya*). The corpse is then taken to the graveyard (*iri əhkhye*).

Consequently the death of an elderly man is celebrated with festivity while that of a young man or woman is marked with sorrow. The emphasis on ancestors as custodians and guardians of the living necessitated this. The festive occasion to celebrate the death of an old man includes musical performance as well as drinking.

The atmosphere and mood of the celebrants portray joy rather than mourning including even the immediate family of the deceased. The music is performed by women with the beating of calabashes in bowls of water. The ceremony for the dead is called *lakiwa* (mourning song). Both men and women dance and sing during the occasion with the men saying “*gaa damalomiya wuu wuu*” (our elder has left us) and the women responding with “*tektek dayana*” (don’t cry). The tune is expected to encourage and remind the gathering that the moment is to rejoice for the soul of the dead. The practice at that time²⁷ was for men to carry spears while dancing as a form of salutation and at the same time intended to fight the creator by pointing to the sky for taking the life of one of them. However, the use of spears to fight the Creator (*dadamiya*) which dancing has been discontinued due to Islamic influence but the celebrations remain that of feast mood. Despite the Kanuri intervention in such celebrative moments the Gamergu continue to rejoice at the death of an elderly person in contrast to that of Kanuri where the mood of the people is that of remorse. The celebration comes to an end with the killing of a bull to appease the ancestors. The death of an old woman, is however, not celebrated but involves a sacrifice on the 7th day of her passing away, which is influenced by the Islamic Kanuri traditions. The mourning of the dead (*kulufade*) will last for a year, during which the children of the deceased will wear a pendant made from white thread and the seed of the *ugvāla* tree to chase the ghost of the deceased away from them. A soothsayer is usually summoned to identify the cause of the death.

Another gathering of close relatives and their friends is conducted on the 12th month of the death (irrespective of the season that it may fall into) to offer sacrifice, which involves the killing of a bull by each adult child of the deceased. The Gamergu people use the solar calendar where the yearly events are linked to sighting and positions of the stars. This occasion locally called *siyire* is for the cleansing and liberation of the family members and does not include musical performance. The children of the deceased will shave off their heads at his grave after which they will return home to share the property among his heirs. The widow is then encouraged to go into levirate marriage where possible though she may decide to return her parents or stay with her children if she is elderly. This gathering is considered to be the final

²⁷ This practice was carried out before the Gamergu converted to Islam before the mid 20th Century.

mourning of the deceased. The community leaders will advise the children on how to live together amicably and will share what they inherit. Some children may decide to maintain the family property and work together to sustain it. When a person is killed in a communal clash or murdered then the appropriate compensation applies.

SPIRIT POSSESSION AND *SHILA* PERFORMANCE

Shila is the Kanuri name for a flute called *gulbe* in Gamergu. It is today widely used in Borno and Yobe States by different ethnic groups, especially, by the Gamergu, Kanuri and Shuwa. However, the instrument could be said to be of Gamergu origin that has both artistic and spiritual functions associated with Gamergu culture as will be observed in the following discussion about spirit possession and the context of the use of the instrument. Many studies on spirit possession have shown that women and lower members of stratified societies are those frequently associated with possession (Giles 1998, 142). Further studies have also indicated that possession provided a therapeutic outlet for psychological frustration, a means to command attention, redress grievances and gain material benefits, and an alternative way to achieve some measure of status and power (Kennedy, 1967; Ferchiou 1972; Crapanzano 1973 and Lewis 1966, 1971, 1986). Even though possession may serve these functions for certain individuals and groups in certain circumstances Lambek's work also emphasises the symbolic medium, which is employed (Lambek 1981, 61). Therefore, spirit possession can be said to convey symbolic meaning as in the case of Ardener's work (1972, 142-143) where she finds that female possession among Bakweri of Cameroon reveals alternative cognitive models which run counter to dominant male models of society. My observation of spirit possession among Gamergu women tend to go along this line but Sheriff's (1995, 18) study on the same subject indicated that possession is a result of the women being stolen by the *goigoi* spirit during childhood. This form of perception is associated with spirit possession among different cultures in the Lake Chad region. The analyses of spirit possession by scholars further indicated possession as culturally constructed (Crapanzano, 1977; Zempleni, 1977) and have adopted seminal concepts of the "cultural text" based on Clifford Geertz's (1972) work. Because the language employed by a society in telling about itself is highly symbolic, spirit possession provides an ideal medium to create powerful metaphorical dramas that are enacted in human form but attributed to

the spirit world (Giles 1998, 143). The human actors are therefore considered as the stage for the spirit to communicate and interact with the human world.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Jebra, 2002.

Figure 13: A Gamergu *shila* musician

Consequently, spirit possession among Gamergu women could be said to represent the women's identity within the wider Gamergu cultural identity. It is important to note that possession among other cultures in the region (i.e. Kanuri, Shuwa, Marghi, Bura, etc.) are not perceived as symbolic expressions of the cultures but rather as an isolated 'subculture' as expressed by Lambek (1981,63). Within the symbolic expression of spirit possession in Gamergu is the therapeutic performance of *shila* music called *vala*. The musical performance is an important stage for both the human

vehicle and the spirits for it is the occasion for the spirits to express their identity to the public and for the human mounts to be able to liberate themselves. The number of spirits that mount the human varies but the musical performance takes twelve different tracks that represent names of spirits. The names and the tracks are dictated by the possessed just like in *ganga* musical ensemble where the oboe player leads the tune. It is interesting to note that the Shehu of Borno's official band (*ganga kura*) used to contain twelve musical tracks for praise songs with additional one track after the installation of the present Shehu in the mid 20th Century (Tijani, 1992, 71). This may interest researchers to investigate further on the possible symbolism of the number twelve in traditional musical performance or spiritual possession in the Lake Chad region or other parts of the world. Since the performance is staged and orchestrated by the possessed it can be divided into four stages. The performance starts with the tune of the first two spirits one after the other – *ngamare and wainare*, which are of Gamergu origin. The mount then expresses herself in a manner welcoming each spirit to the arena. The musical tune goes along the same line that is expressed in the sound, which is in Gamergu language. The tune of the song reads '*ngamare kwai hane duwa jinejə wabəre*' and translated as '*ngamare, clear the door as she is coming*'. Then the second spirit's tune follows: '*wainare are nanyiro*'. This tune involves Kanuri language: '*wainare come to me*'. The second stage involves three spirits namely *jagargara kuluwuma*, *kashantamaka* and *aisami dəgamadəga*. *Jagargara* is a Kanuri spirit that dwells in the river. The possessed at this tune communicates in Kanuri, which is an indication that she can speak any language even without prior knowledge of the foreign language as also explained by Giles in her work on the Swahili society (Giles 1998, 150). *Kashantamaka* is also a Gamergu spirit that dwells in a tamarind tree. The full tune is: *Kashantamaka sərna ya shatam vra manye* (where did you get this leg? I got it from the tamarind tree of Manye). The human mount expresses the behaviour of each spirit in the context of its dwelling, hence indicating herself swimming or climbing with reference to either *jagargara* or *kashantamaka* spirits respectively. Sometimes the bodily expressions performed by the mount are beyond normal human ability, which indicates control of the human vehicle by the spirits.

The performance culminates in the third phase into more complex acrobatics and vulgar utterance. It is the peak of the performance and involves four spirits namely

muksa, kacala, nana maryam and *parpar madava*. These spirits are considered dirty, violent and uncivilized as is expressed in the actions of their human mount. The possessed woman makes some vulgar statements and cuts her body with a sharp knife. The spirits are not only harmful but also like dirty and impure food. This is portrayed by the actions of the woman in eating both human faeces and animal droppings and drinking the blood from the cuts. However the cuts inflicted on her body will miraculously disappear to the surprise of the audience as stated by the musician (Ali, 2001). Vulgar utterances rendered in her full speeches are: *muksa gəlabda ba mara a bəza dala a niga niga* (Gəlabda woman of he mother who jumps over the fence backward). *Kacala jina jə wabre kwai kuda duwa* (Kacala open the door for my penis is coming). *Ajakədija bohyamam suwa təda gigale an jadam hyime na Nana Maryam* (clitoris fell into a well and when a rat with ear-rings removed it, Nana Maryam said yes!) and the final track in this stage is: *Parpar madava gulakwa naje* (A giraffe's skin is a shield for the clitoris). She communicates in many languages that are not known to the people. The woman may not, even after recovery, be able to speak or explain the languages.

The final stage is performed with the tune of the three spirits called *kurwuli dinar, salki samari* and *kaltumiya*. These spirits are meant to calm down the momentum of filth, impurity and uncivilized behaviour into a civilized and normal condition as could be discerned from the full speech. *Kurwuli dinar kəmanyi əgzara yaga* (Kurwuli spirit, the gold of God and Muhammad's followers). *Kurwuli dinar* is a Muslim spirit hence the mount performs some Islamic actions. *Sarki samari mbatan mame* (the youth leader is stubborn). *Salki samari* is a Hausa spirit considered to be the leader of youth. And the last track of the final stage is rendered as follows: *Kaltəmiya zaitte a maldara baəgdzakci gah* (what is left with Kaltume Zaitte is just her clitoris).

Beside this therapeutic performance of the *shila* ensemble against the possessed there is also the use of the instrument itself to cure the possessed. Some of the possessed women can be cured by drinking water that is passed through the flute. These women are the ones that get afflicted by hearing the sound of the flute but do not require the performance of the *shila* ensemble for therapeutic purpose. When she drinks the water then she can stay during any performance without being afflicted. This

category of women is not afflicted by the spirit to an advanced stage compared to those requiring the performance of the *shila* ensemble. The performance will take a day or two to complete before the affliction subsides.

It is interesting to observe today that the *shila* instrument used for therapeutic performance of the spirit possession is used for other forms of musical entertainment. The Kanuri and Shuwa people use the instrument for praise songs and entertainment during ceremonies such as marriage, naming etc. The original ensemble included the *kwali* women players that used pestles and sticks but is replaced by the *kasakasa* (a small, round gourd with stones inside it) rattle player to introduce some entertainment into the performance. Hence it could be observed that since the *shila* performance in Gamergu culture was associated with anti-Islam then the Kanuri might have transformed its context of usage to be engaged in Islamic context of ceremonies such as marriage, naming, etc.

Even though the *shila* performance was originally used for therapeutic cure of those possessed by spirits, we do not, however, know whether the performance instigated the possession or vice versa. However, we could possibly say that the tradition of spirit possession in the area is attributed to the Gamergu but the musical performance may be doubtful. The *shila* music is now a household tradition among the Kanuri and Shuwa even though its context and function are different from that of Gamergu. It is for this reason that we can say there is heavy influence by the Kanuri, especially looking at the number of tracks that formed part of the musical performance. The musical ensemble of the band of the Shehu of Borno also contains twelve tracks in its performance for entertaining and praising the Shehu (Tijani, 1992, 70). The fact that the *shila* musical performance contains similar number of track could be said to have some historical link or influence from the Kanuri tradition. One cannot rule out the possibility of Gamergu influence over the Kanuri where the number of tracks played in the *ganga* ensemble may be adopted from that of Gamergu *shila* performance. Certainly there is a lot of inter-cultural influence that could not be identified with a particular ethnic group. It is possible that over the period of Kanuri dominance in the region additional tracks were developed to form part of the original tracks due to the appearance of some Kanuri and Hausa words in the tracks. The fact that some of the songs are in Kanuri and Hausa languages may support possible influence by both

traditions. Similarly, the musical ensemble has since been known with its Kanuri name of *shila* rather than the Gamergu word *gulbe*.

CONCLUSION

The life cycle as enumerated above has provided us with some knowledge of the Gamergu culture. It is however, important to note here that the process of child birth in most of the societies in the region is similar (e.g. Mandara, Marghi, Mafa, etc.) except for certain aspects that are emphasized by individual groups from another. In this context, the Gamergu place emphasis on the birth of the first child, who is considered as the symbol of identity of his subsequent siblings. This belief has therefore given priority for the mother to have her first child delivered in her own compound where the placenta and the child's umbilical cord are buried within the compound. This practice is different from the Kanuri tradition where the young mother-to-be is expected to deliver her first child at the compound of her parents (grandparents of the expected child). The protection of the child from birth onward against any spiritual or physical sickness is a tradition that is maintained by all societies in the region. Similarly, twins are regarded as having spiritual powers in some cultures in Africa and also consider their spiritual possession as either a deterrent to or in favour of the progress of the family and community. In order to avert any negative spells that twins may bring to the family in most cultures certain rituals are conducted so that they can engage in positive actions. Even though the issue of identity begins with the symbolization of the placenta and the cord as observed earlier there is no doubt that individual identity is portrayed in the naming of the child. Naming of a child in most African societies is considered to encompass many aspects surrounding his birth though such linkage may differ from one society to another. Traditional names given to the child, in most situations, expresses historical associations or family tradition. There are certain names allocated to a boy or a girl born on each day of the week, a practice which is common among the Hausa people but not found in Kanuri tradition. The use of animal names to refer to a child is also common among both Gamergu and Kanuri societies. Such animals usually have link to the clan history. However, there is not much oral information on the manner of naming a child before the influence of Kanuri and Islam. What we know today could be said to be an Islamic feature, brought by the Kanuri where a child is

given an Arabic name on the eighth day of the birth. The local tradition of bearing a traditional name is still maintained by the Gamergu (see fig. 9) which is considered important among the people.

Circumcision is another Islamic feature that was introduced during the arrival of the Kanuri to the region. A boy is today circumcised at the age of seven years and is regarded as one of the first stages of initiation toward adulthood. Both Kanuri and Gamergu societies do not circumcise female even though the Shuwa people in the region are engaged in female circumcision. Oral traditions from the pre-Kanuri settlers have attested to the fact that boys were not circumcised among the autochthonous groups in the region including the Gamergu. However a majority of the Gamergu settlements visited confirmed that circumcision has been in practice for over a century since those aged over 70 years old confirmed that their fathers were also circumcised. During adolescence the boys undergo their first initiation, which then qualifies them to engage in adult activity and possibly get married. The process of initiation (*kyarva*) occurs when the boy becomes sick and consults a priest. It is however, interesting to see consistency in male initiations where at a later stage the male adult also goes through another ritual in a similar way for him to elevate to a more respected elder in the society. This method of child initiation is not practised among the Kanuri but most of the autochthonous groups in the region have similar initiation even though at different ages and methods. The girls on the other hand, are becoming mothers with full responsibility of taking care of their compounds. They can now participate in ceremonies and represent the family at communal occasions.

The period of courtship among the Gamergu is different from that of Kanuri in the way labour or money forms part of it. The Gamergu see the contribution of labour as a symbolic act toward commitment to the relationship through the period of residency at the bride's compound. This is discouraged in modern times due to Islamization. The Kanuri form of courtship is restricted to regular presents given to the woman on weekly basis by the man which consist of kola nut and money. The Gamergu man that used to take residence at the girl's compound during a period of courtship enabled him to take possession of her and remove her to his parent's

residence²⁸. This practice however discontinued with the arrival of the Kanuri and Islamic values during colonial times in the mid 20th Century where defaulters were fined or sentenced.

Once the man has undergone the initiation process and becomes a member of the Elders' Committee he assumes an advisory position and can preside over certain communal activities. It is a well respected status for every adult man in the community to achieve up to present times. By using his status wisely and properly he can attain the position of an ancestor after his death at the appropriate age of 70 years and above. In this manner he is seen to continue to live even after death as he is being consulted as an ancestor.

Gamergu lifecycle has undergone tremendous transformation from that of a unique non-Islamic autochthonous tradition in the 14th century to that of a frontier Kanurized tradition in the present times. During this process of transformation the Gamergu people feel proud that they have maintained certain feature of their lifecycle that reflects their Gamergu-ness, which they also propagate in modern upheavals for cultural revival and identity. There is growing youth awareness through the formation of Gamergu cultural identity and reflected in their modern agricultural production and land tenure where Gamergu land attracted Kanuri migrants.

The next chapter will now focus on the Gamergu household system and family farmstead practice where the individual plays a vital role in the economic and social integration of the family. The chapter will also describe the art of compound construction and layout.

²⁸ Taking residence at the girl's compound was only in practice before Gamergu were Islamized before the end of the 20th Century.

CHAPTER SEVEN

GAMERGU HOUSEHOLD AND FAMILY FARMSTEAD

INTRODUCTION

As we discussed in the previous chapter the Gamergu have survived many decades of Kanuri dominance and influence where they emerged from an aboriginal status to that of a frontier people. We have also seen how such influences exerted on them have affected their culture. Nevertheless the Gamergu are still seen today as one of the distinct ethnic groups of Borno with the language and some aspect of their tradition in practice. However, there are spheres of Gamergu culture that distinctively express their tradition, especially in the nature of the household and layout of the structures of their compounds. This chapter will therefore, present the Gamergu household as the centre of economic activities of the family which is exemplified in the family farmstead practice that contributes towards the sustenance of its members. Although the Gamergu identify 3 farming seasons, namely, rainy season farming (*hārda vaya*), *fadama* (*firki*) farming and dry season farming, the family farmstead practice only applies to the rainy season and *fadama* farming. The individual is therefore left to practice on his own during the dry season which is mainly for generating personal income. The chapter will further present the yearly activity of compound construction carried out by the Gamergu people in their communities. Compound construction for the Gamergu people is, therefore, a significant aspect of their social life and the process of building their huts contributes to their identity and is considered as one of the most significant way of expressing Gamergu-ness. Form and space in each compound is of utmost importance, hence they need to be planned properly, particularly having in mind the number of members in the family and possible increase in the future. Gamergu villages are different from those of Kanuri because of their dispersed nature into clusters of hamlets. However, the pattern of Gamergu villages is not as coherent as the layout of the compound itself where the material culture representation within the structures could easily be identified with Gamergu-ness. Yet the style of compound construction is part of the overall household endeavour that could be said to be influenced by the Kanuri tradition over the years of their presence in the region. If this tradition is still maintained among the

Gamergu could we say that it has also influenced that of Kanuri culture? We will examine the household of modern Gamergu society and the process of compound construction among the people.

HOUSEHOLD

The nature of a Gamergu household is similar to that of Kanuri even though the Gamergu compound composed mainly of the extended family members. According to oral tradition (Yaga, 1996) the pre-Kanuri Gamergu, with a pagan lifestyle, had bigger household composition that consisted of the head (father), wives, daughters, sons and their wives as well as grandchildren. The nature of earlier Gamergu families could be linked to their farmstead practice that was being controlled by the head within the family structure. Their pagan lifestyle that did not restrict the number of wives one could possess enabled a man to have any number of wives which is put at the average of five. The family size is then likely to grow up to an average of 20 people in the household. This number has, however, dropped considerably since the beginning of the 20th Century due largely to Kanuri dominance and modernisation which affected ways and means of their survival in the 20th Century. The Gamergu household which is formed by a family starting with the couple which grows in size to consist of the extended family members that live in the same compound such as the children, the families of adult sons and grandchildren (see fig. 14 below). When the children get married the female ones go to their husband's compound whereas the men bring their wives into the father's compound. The size of the household varies depending on the number of sons who are married with their own children within the household. The Gamergu compound also consists of the household members that form the family farmstead practice called *umarashere* (detail description given below). The household and the compound as well as the farmstead practice are synonymous in Gamergu society. Kanuri households, according to Cohen may or may not necessarily consist of the family or any set of kinship groups (Cohen, 1967, 48). This is because in many compounds the family and the household are certainly not the same. The Kanuri household may include the adoption of non-family members that help the household head on his domestic and business activities (referred to as *tada njima*) form part of the household (Cohen, 1967, 50). It is also possible in Kanuri compounds to find two or more households that are unrelated

thrive as one household. The siblings of the new head will continue to maintain normal relation with their brother and give him similar respect as they did to their father. Conflicts do not arise where in the past the eldest son also adopts his father's wives with the exception of his mother. However, in present times conflict may arise where some of the married sons decide to share the inheritance in order to assume independence. But conflict may not occur in a situation where the landholdings will remain in the household pool with all the members benefiting under *umarashere* arrangement. In the case of the Kanuri Cohen (1967, 51) maintained that instability occurs in the family rather than in the household since the family can split as a result of divorce, death or movement of its personnel to a new place. In such situations the household will remain but its personnel may change, its landholdings may expand or contract and its head may shift. In the Gamergu context instability is minimal because the household is mainly formed by the family and some close kindred and the personnel play an important role in the family farmstead. The members of the family in the household may reduce or increase in size due to marriage, death or making a married son independent. For example, one or two girls that get married and leave to their husbands will reduce the size of the household but a son that marries a wife into the household and bears children will increase the household size. This trend will continue so long as marriages take place and some of the men move out of the compound. However, the household cannot be allowed to over-grow in size since there is the mechanism of moving people out of the compound so that the space in the compound is not over used. The Gamergu do not adopt distant relatives or keep adults in the compound other than those from slave raids, the practice of which has been discontinued. This is in contrast to that of the Kanuri who are known for the generosity in adopting and keeping unmarried adult men in their compounds that assist the household head in many spheres of life. These are in addition to sons of close and distant family members. The head also takes responsibility for their feeding and clothing as well as their marriage (Cohen, 1967, 50).

The arrival of the Kanuri to the region and the subsequent establishment of the capital in Maiduguri brought about population expansion and modernization. Subsequently there was a decline in the economic production of the Gamergu household who were pushed further to the periphery thereby contributing to difficulties in maintaining the extended family household. Even though the Gamergu

are known to be successful farmers the economic situation of the 20th Century has increased the demands upon the individual and his quest for survival. Among such economic and social conditions include the provision of education, shelter, food and religious awareness. The social conditions which enable the traditional institutions and social hierarchy require more investment and time in an environment that provides competitions and attractive choices. Hence the traditional institutions have to provide better incentives and requirements for the individual to survive as a true member of the society. For example:

One Modu has seven children and among them are two adults that are married. His eldest son Səga wanted to go and live at the urban centre of Maiduguri before his marriage. Modu could not accept his son's proposal hence he tried to convince him to stay in the village. Modu would then have to provide certain acceptable conditions for his son in order to make him change his mind and stay in the village so that his younger siblings could learn from him. Modu then went to seek advice from his friends and the elders' committee. The advice he gathered, which is in line with the norms of the society includes that of providing his son with more responsibility and access to property. He then made him independent by taking him out of the *umarashere* farmstead and providing him with his own land. A new compound was also constructed for him outside the family compound. In addition Səga was vested with the responsibility of taking care of one of his younger siblings. With this new responsibility and status Səga then became contented and decided to remain in the village. He feels he has now assumed a proper responsibility of being a father and husband that is highly regarded as the very essential status of becoming a responsible member of the society.

This arrangement of sustaining an individual member of a household is an expensive venture that requires extra expenses and obligation which are not easy to provide given the number of household members. This example has therefore shown that the family head, Modu, has given up one of the family farms and the labour force in the family is reduced by about 4 people. This manner of setting off members of the household was not practised, in the past, which could be regarded as one of the

means through which sizes of household dropped considerably. We could say that in a single village an average of 5 cases takes place each year; and the number is increasing.

Divorce and death do cause instability in Gamergu households even though the divorce rate is considerably lower compared to that of Kanuri society. Death of the head of the household may sometimes result in serious instability, especially where there is no capable son to take charge of the household. In such situations the household may be divided and the entire property shared among the heirs. Divorce on the other hand, particularly of an elderly woman who has adult children, may cause instability in the household. This occurs when the elder son feels responsible to look after his mother then it can trigger the son to move out of the household to his own where he can make his mother part of his new household. A Gamergu household is much larger because every male child that gets married is under an obligation to stay in the household with his family until the head feels it is time for him to set up his own compound. This will then result in the landholding contracting and the size of its personnel being reduced.

Modern western education is seen in the 20th Century as one of the major factors responsible for change in societies. Gamergu communities are not left behind as they are among the areas reached by western education. The demand for educating each child in western schools is by no means free for the parents, compared to that of Quranic education where the parents hardly incur any costs of educating the child. Western schools are not located in every village which makes it difficult for students in the vicinity to trek to the schools given the dispersed nature of Gamergu settlements. Consequently parents have to bear the cost of maintaining such difficult conditions where such parents decide to enrol their children into western schools. This form of education is also seen by the Gamergu people as distracting their children from participating in both domestic and farming activities which inevitably contributes to decline in the household economy.

Household Economy

The occupations of the Gamergu people can be categorised into primary and secondary. The primary source of income is farming, as it is the main occupation of the majority of people. Other occupations regarded as secondary, which are carried out alongside farming include animal husbandry, fishing, petty trading and craftwork. The Gamergu were known to be industrious as most of the markets in the area, particularly that of Uje were full of their products. They played an important role in revenue generation in Borno. Gamergu people also provided other services that included dyeing, weaving and building. The fertile nature of the area occupied by the Gamergu enables them to live comfortably on the proceeds of agriculture that was also noted by Barth in his description of Uje.

It may contain nine to ten thousand inhabitants and seems to be prosperous; indeed all the dwellings despicable as they may appear to the fastidious Europeans, bear testimony to a certain degree of wealth and few people seem destitute of the necessaries of life (Barth, 1854).

The Gamergu from all indication played a leading role in the production of cotton and the bulk of agricultural products in the region come from irrigated farming, which are mainly sold for income generation. Agricultural produce under rain fed cultivation (cereal, beans, etc) are generally for subsistence throughout the year, though depending on the size of the farm and family, a greater percentage may be used for income purposes. Similarly those that have only rain fed farms may end up selling a higher percentage of their produce to generate income during the year.

The income generated from these products is used to solve domestic and social problems and also serve as input for further agricultural production. For example, income generated from rain fed agriculture is partly used to buy inputs required for irrigated farming since rain fed harvest takes place before the commencement of irrigated farming. Similarly, income from irrigated farming is used on rain fed farming.

Animal husbandry is not the main occupation of the Gamergu people but most households keep a certain number of livestock which include goats and sheep. These animals are usually kept in the same rooms where people dwell, especially at night when mosquitoes are frequent, which could be one of the reasons for not having large numbers. Fishing on the other hand is carried out by local people and migrants. This influx of immigrant fishermen was seasonal and tended to be very competitive, particularly for the local people that do not want to spend much on inputs.

The production of craftworks is another form of income generation for the local people, particularly for women and the elderly. Pottery production and hairstyling are the work of women whereas men engage in weaving and woodwork. Most of these works are carried out seasonally due to weather condition and/or availability of raw material.

Family Farmstead Practice

Even though there is an influx of immigrants to the fertile Gamerguland to obtain arable land, mainly through derived rights for cultivation, the Gamergu people still maintain their traditional farmstead system that enables family members to have access to and work on family land. The Gamergu practice a form of family farming system called *umarashere*, which is similar to the Hausa form of *gandu*. This type of paternal *umarashere* performed by the Gamergu is maintained to date. *Umarashere* literally denotes the farm labour arrangement entered into between the father, the son and wives.

The nature of Gamergu household is that of an extended family system where the son resides in the compound of his father even after getting married. The son — whether married or single — will therefore work on the family farm under *umarashere*. The motive behind the son taking residence at his father's compound cannot be ascertained — as to whether the *umarashere* necessitated the residence or vice versa — even though the arrangement is terminated after the son takes his own residence.

Umarashere enables the son to work on the father's farm on certain days of the week in return for the father catering for most of his needs and that of his family (if married). *Umarashere* farming, therefore, requires the father to provide his son with the financial needs for his social amenities and obligations, such as marriages, naming ceremonies, etc. It is the responsibility of the father to provide his married son with shelter in his compound. There may be more than one son in the compound and all will be eligible for *umarashere*. This arrangement is not only between the father and the son but also extends to the same type between the husband and his wife/ves. The arrangement allows the son and wives to contribute labour on the family farm in the mornings of Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. With this arrangement the sons and wives can work on their farms (*əgdza əzəhwa*) in the afternoons of the days mentioned. Nevertheless they can decide to work on the family farm in the afternoons if they do not have much to do on their own farms except that the wife whose turn it is to cook will then be engaged with domestic work. However, they also have Tuesdays and Fridays to exclusively work on their farms since it is forbidden by Gamergu tradition for them to work on the family farms. Hence there is the belief that when they work on family farm on Tuesdays that thunder (*rade*) will strike them. Similarly working on the family farm on Fridays will not be possible because the soil is believed to be hard (*dəmdəmme haha*).

***Umarashere* farming seasons**

The Gamergu people identify three types of farming seasons namely the rainy season farming (*hərda vaya*), *fadama* (*firki*) farming and dry season farming which occupy most of their time. The *umarashere* practice applies only to the rainy season and *fadama* farming even though not all households practise both at the same time. The rainy season farming starts on the 6 month of the sighting of the star (the author is not able to identify the star but the month falls in April) with the clearing of the field (*shodokfe*). The star is therefore, sighted in early November and forms the basis of counting the months of the year. This type of dating is widely used and pre-dates the Islamic *Hijra* calendar. Sowing starts in the 7 month for millet farms just before the rain starts falling and is referred to as *shesha*. However, that of sorghum (*jahiya*) will start a month later when the rainfall stabilises. Preparation for *fadama* farms begins after about three months of the rainfall with the clearing of the *firki* soil for *masakwa*

variety. The *fadama* farmland is considered the most tedious of all the farming types due to its intensive labour and attention that it required. This type of farming also requires the delicate preparation of nurseries for transplanting on the *firgi* soils.

Rights and obligations under *umarashere*

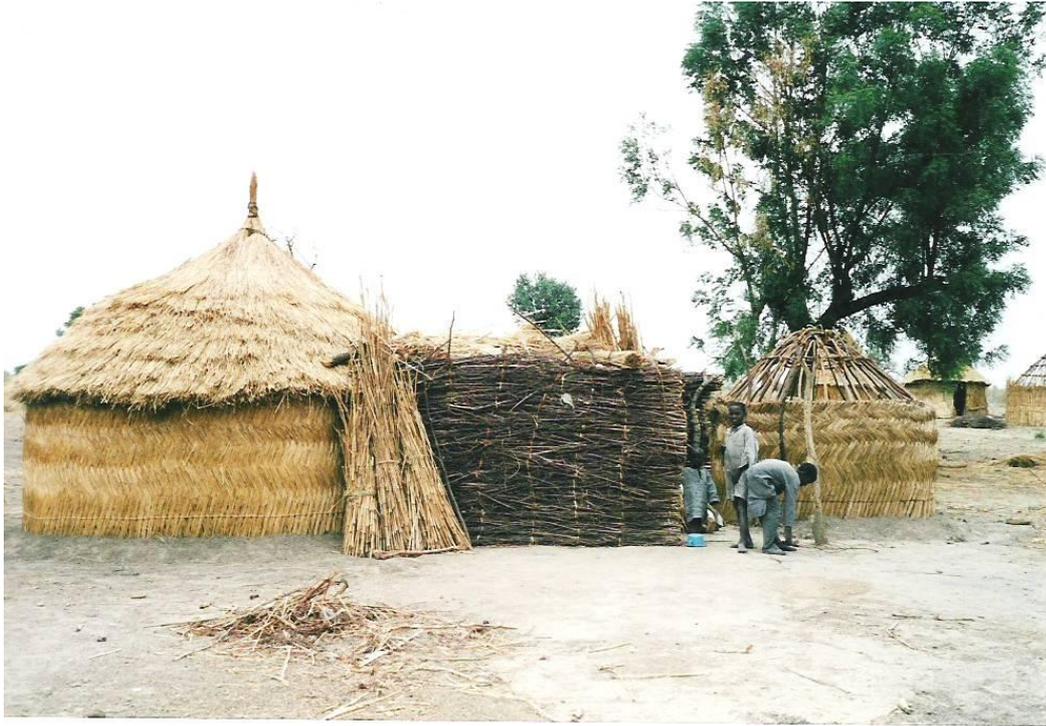
The father controls and directs the farming activities throughout the two farming seasons starting from the clearance to harvesting. The father and the son clear the farmland at each season with the assistance of members of the family. If the father is aged or has enough adult children in the family then he is relieved of the labour by them. Labour is sometimes shared between the men and women depending on its intensiveness and the season. *Shehsha*, for example, is the work of men because the millet is sown on dry soil that involves hard work in the procedure whereas both women and children participate during *jahiya* that takes place when the soil is wet and can easily be sown. The father as the head of *umarashere* does not exercise any rights over the growing of beans that are usually inter-cropped as it is purely the work of women. The head of the *umarashere* controls the son and wives' labour on the days of the week mentioned earlier during the two farming seasons. The son and wives, therefore control their right of labour for the whole day on Tuesdays and Fridays with the afternoons of Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursday being optional times to work on either farm. The son may decide to work during the afternoons on the farms as a paid labourer to generate income but will not work on the father's farm under this arrangement. He would rather contribute labour free of charge on the father's farm. Because of the intensity of agriculture in the area the sons spend considerable time on paid labour, especially when they do not have a farm of their own. They therefore use such times to search for paid labour. On the other hand the son works exclusively on his farm during dry season farming. The dry season farming is mainly for income generation and ends when the water dries up in the lakes and rivers. The harvest during this season goes to the son, which he sells.

The head of *umarashere* controls the harvest from the family farms, which is taken to the compound for storage in the underground granaries. The wives are allowed to keep a certain amount of the harvest for domestic use in their granaries located at

their rooms that is expected to last them for the year. Large pots for room decoration are also used for the storage of grains. The share of a tenth (*butu*) for the head of the community as well as for servicing debts is taken from the lot before storage. The grain in storage is only taken out for selling when the head of *umarashere* feels it necessary for use during marriages or other obligations of members of the family. *Umarashere* farms can be sold at anytime by the head without consulting the members of the family even though he usually tries to keep *umarashere* farms for use by its members. The head can give out an *umarashere* farm to his son but in most cases it forms part of setting him off independently (*nura irane*). Such a son gaining economic independence also means that he will move out of his father's compound to his own compound with his family and sets up his own *umarashere* practice.

COMPOUND CONSTRUCTION

Gamergu huts are not that different from those of Kanuri or other ethnic groups in the region in their outlook as described by Nachtigal, which consist of a conical roof (see fig. 15 below). The substructure is made of mud walls (see fig. 16 below) or of a wooden framework covered with matting, the roof of various materials usually furnished by the stalks of whatever grain is to be found locally (Nachtigal, 1826, 610). Despite the similarity the Gamergu villages are easily discernable in the manner of the clusters of their compounds detached from each other to form village units. However their internal structure and their method of construction are unique to the Gamergu people as detailed description is given below. A Gamergu compound, as earlier stated is formed on the basis of the family, which increases in number through the extended family system thereby requiring the expansion of its structure as time goes by. In this regard the household is responsible for providing the required shelter to its members hence it undertakes the construction of rooms within the compound and possibly new compounds for those members that become independent.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 15: A Gamergu hut with conical roof



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 16: Modern square hut wall

The construction of a compound is an important activity that is carried out yearly among Gamergu communities. The renovation of old huts and construction of new ones begins immediately after clearing the farm in preparation for the rainy season farming. The building of huts will however end before the clearing of the sorghum farms. Because of the importance attached to the construction of compounds this specific period is set aside each year to carry out the activity. Each household is expected to provide and maintain proper shelter for its members. The construction is seen as an art, which is guided by sets of procedures unique to the community. It was therefore essential for every Gamergu adult to know the art. There are three ways of constructing a hut in Gamergu society. The first two will have the wall of the hut done before constructing the top separately. There are two types of wall constructed. There is a square wall built with mud bricks and a round wall made with branches of trees (see fig. 17 below). The mud wall is a recent development, which according to the people was introduced to the area by the Kanuri people in the 1950s. Whichever type of wall is used in this case the top is constructed separately before mounting it on the wall. The third way is to construct the hut from the wall up to the top together.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 17: Making the skeletal roof to match the wall

Laying Foundation and Structure of the Walls:

The foundation of the wall is made in circular way by digging holes to plant the branches called *nafashima* with their tops in V-shapes. The height of the *nafashima* will be about 1.2m and the top is held together by a bundle of thin but strong branches called *dishe* as the top circumference of the wall and the base of the top of the hut. In between the *dishe* and the ground the *nafashima* is held together at different positions by another bundle of thin branches to give the circular form of the hut and to strengthen the *nafashima*. At this stage *zana* mat called *sale* is placed round the outer part of *nafashima*. A big wooden pillar called *nakawe bre* is planted in the centre of the hut to later hold the centre part of the top. The hut is left at this stage if the top is constructed separately. However, if the hut is to be continued up to the top together then *melo* is made and attached to the top of centre pillar. The *melo* is constructed by forming a circle with a bundle of branches. The circular construction measuring about 70cm is held together with two sticks crossed together in an X-shape called *kra bre*. Then additional long branches called *thelba* for forming the top will be fixed to the *dishe*, and up to the *melo*, which will give the top shape of the hut. The sticks (*thelba*) are held together at different intervals, like that of *nafashima* in the circular form by long branches called *dara bre*. The skeletal form of the hut is now formed and what is required is the covering of the top with *yara bre* (roof).

The next stage of construction is usually done during the year in anticipation of such activity of compound construction. The kind of *zana* mat used in covering the top of the hut is crucial to the construction of the hut. This is an activity that every adult and youth engage in during the year when farming activity is minimal or not done. The roofing thatch used is made with a kind of shrub called *daka wulva* (see fig. 18 below). The shrubs are tied in bundles to some thin branches that are flexible to form the fence. The fence is laid on the roof and together with some loose shrubs is tied to the sticks. The hut is now ready for use.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 18: *Daka wulva* used as roof thatch

Construction of the Roof

On the other hand where the base of the hut is made separate from the roof then the roof is constructed on the ground before raising it to the top. This construction of the roof in this way is considered to be the best and easiest where precise measurement could be achieved. This is done by first taking the measurement of the base of the hut constructed, which will give the exact dimension to the base of the roof in order to align well. With the dimension taken that is length and width in the case of a square mud base or circumference in the case of a circular base. Then some pegs called *kodu* are fixed on the ground to define the size of the base of the roof called *dishe* (see fig. 19 below). The pegs also serve in holding the *dishe* from expanding when the long sticks *thelba* forming the top are fixed to it. In the centre of the base poles are planted in square form, parallel to the main formation, which will be up to the height of the roof. The poles will hold the *melo* where the *thelba* from the *dishe* is fixed to it. This will give the skeletal format of the roof that can then be transferred to the main hut after appropriate tightening of the sticks. The roof is then covered in the same way with mat.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 19: Layout of the *dishe* as the base of the roof

Renovation of old compounds is done after 2-3 years of use. Such renovations will cover the replacement of pillars that are attacked by termites. The mats are usually in good condition even after such period of usage. However, after a long period they are also re-sewn to make them stronger and last longer.

The activity of building and renovating compounds is sometimes done with communal help. Friends and relations may come together to assist in the construction of the compound after the owner might have gathered the required materials (see fig. 20 below). Such assistance proffered must also be returned to the respective people when they come to do similar activity in the future. Women and young children do not participate in the activity. Relatives or persons that are responsible for the care of elderly women take responsibility of building their huts. The Gamergu believe that the mode of building their huts, especially their sizes, have changed over the years. They used to construct large huts that could contain most of their belongings including their animals. Nowadays the huts are smaller and are for human habitation only which could be attributed to the reduction in size even though old men and

women do keep a small number of goats or sheep in their rooms. Another reason for the decrease in the size of the rooms is because youths of today do not like to undergo the tedious work involved in the construction of large huts compared to the small types. The option of building small rooms will then require the animals to have separate places in the compound. Usually an open fenced area is allocated to the animals but they are moved to a separate room during the rainy season when there are mosquitoes. The room of the senior co-wife and the others are the same size except for the large kitchen for the senior one.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe,

2001.

Figure 20: Lifting the roof onto the wall

Layout of the Compound

The location of the rooms in the compound is also important in Gamergu tradition. The room of the senior wife called *bra thiadawe* (where there is more than one wife) is always the first to be constructed, which is located to the east of the compound. The door will face north with a shed called *dzadzawe* constructed by the door attached to the room. A cooking shed called *embe* (see fig. 21 below) is also a

compulsory part of the senior wife's compound. The co-wife's room is located north of the senior co-wife with her door facing west. A shed by the door is also constructed but with an optional kitchen, which is usually comparably smaller. The husband's room is always located in the western part of the compound with its door facing east. This means that the husband's room and that of the senior co-wife are directly opposite even though her door faces north. However, the younger wife's door tends to face that of the husband's even though not directly. Then the other rooms in the compound are located in any manner appropriate to the household head. The main entrance of the compound is usually facing south or west. There is no reason for this act but they believe it is the way they discovered from their ancestors. The children will also have their rooms located within the compound even when they get married. However, young children will live with their mothers before getting married. Adult children that are not married, nowadays live in separate rooms where available in the compound. It is the tradition among Gamergu for married sons to bring their spouses to live with them in the family compound. In this circumstance then the married son's structure is laid out in a similar way to that of the parents and located in the southern part of the compound. There is no limit to the number of married sons living in the compound as long as space is available for expansion.



Photograph by A.I. Tijani, Ishga Kewe, 2001.

Figure 21: A Senior Wife's hut (*bra thiadawe*) with a shed and cooking area (*embe*)

Initiation and Construction of Compound for Independent Sons

However, adult children may also decide to have their separate compound from that of their parents. In such situations an honest and trustworthy person is called upon to lay the foundation of the compound's fence. Before the foundation is laid the wife of the adult child must put a handful of food in his mouth. His relatives will assist in the construction of the new compound. All the materials required for the construction are gathered on the same day. The compound construction is a big event with the person killing as much as a bull or a goat for feeding the relatives that assist him. It is also on this day that the child gains his independence since the father (depending on his wealth) will give him some portions of his wealth (e.g. 20-30 cows).

The elders bless the man with prayers and words of wisdom that will encourage him to start a prosperous independent life. The wealth given to him is not included as part of the father's wealth during inheritance. Married sons that are not given their independence in this way must always stay in the parents' compound with their daily feeding vested on the father. The way their family rooms are located is comparable to

that of their father. There is no limit to the number of sons in the compound that live with their families depending on the space available within the compound and possible expansions (since most compounds are not attached to each other).

CONCLUSION

The practice of family farmstead among the Gamergu is the essential factor for the economic prosperity of the household. The practice of *umarashere* farmstead encompasses the entire members of the household under the control of the head. The nature of the farmstead therefore brought about cohesion among the members of the household and a sense of collective responsibility in the economic endeavour of the family as well as the individual. The individual is also given recognition within the farmstead practice to seek his own farming outlet both during the two farming seasons associated with *umarashere* and in the dry season. The individual in an *umarashere* practice can emerge as an independent person having been removed from the family farmstead to establish and head his own household. The 20th century has necessitated frequency of this practice due to modernisation, Kanuri influence and a declining economy. The Gamergu have also placed the construction of compounds in the centre of their annual activities. The compound is seen as an important aspect of Gamergu identity where the household and the family farmstead as well as the compound are conterminous. Men are the ones involved and responsible for the construction of the compound.

We have seen so far how Gamergu settlements were brought under the Kanuri political structure and *chima* systems in chapter five and also how Gamergu identity is portrayed in their life cycle and initiation in chapter six. This chapter has portrayed political stability of the Gamergu which then paved the way for economic prosperity where Gamergu arable land attracted people from outside to cultivate. Gamergu as good farmers attracted many Kanuri to buy their agricultural products and handicrafts. Then cross-border shopping brought people together and thus help transcend entrenched patterns of ethnic and religious strife. The next chapter will highlight this process of settlement and the contract arrangements under derived rights and economic activities pertinent to these.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PRODUCTION AND ECONOMIC RESPONSE OF ARABLE GAMERGU LAND TO KANURI MIGRATION AND MODERNISATION

INTRODUCTION

The area occupied by the Gamergu people is known to be fertile for agriculture compared to the region in the north of Borno, which is mainly populated by the Kanuri. Hence both Kanuri rulers and peasants were attracted to the area in order to take advantage of the agricultural opportunities. Consequently Gamergu social relations and farming systems were transformed as a result of modern requirements of farming practices and by immigrants attracted by the fertility of the land. There was an influx of people from different walks of life, especially from the adjacent capital city of Maiduguri. This influx of people also resulted in changes in the land rights system from the local mode of access²⁹ to temporary derived land rights system in order to enable immigrant farmers to gain access to land to cultivate. This chapter will therefore describe the local mode of access to arable land and examine how a modern land rights system is transforming the area into one of small scale farming by foreigners on the local population. The work will also present the nature and types of derived land rights associated with the area and their security or otherwise under the different contractual arrangements. The work will similarly discuss the influence of the influx of immigrants to the region and how their activities might have affected social relations among those involved in the land transactions and their relatives. The chapter will further discuss the nature of the crops being cultivated and how this might have influenced the contract arrangements. The focus of this chapter is centred on Lake Alau because of the prominence of such activity in the area and its proximity to the State capital of Maiduguri and peri-urban Local Government headquarters where most of those attracted to the area originate.

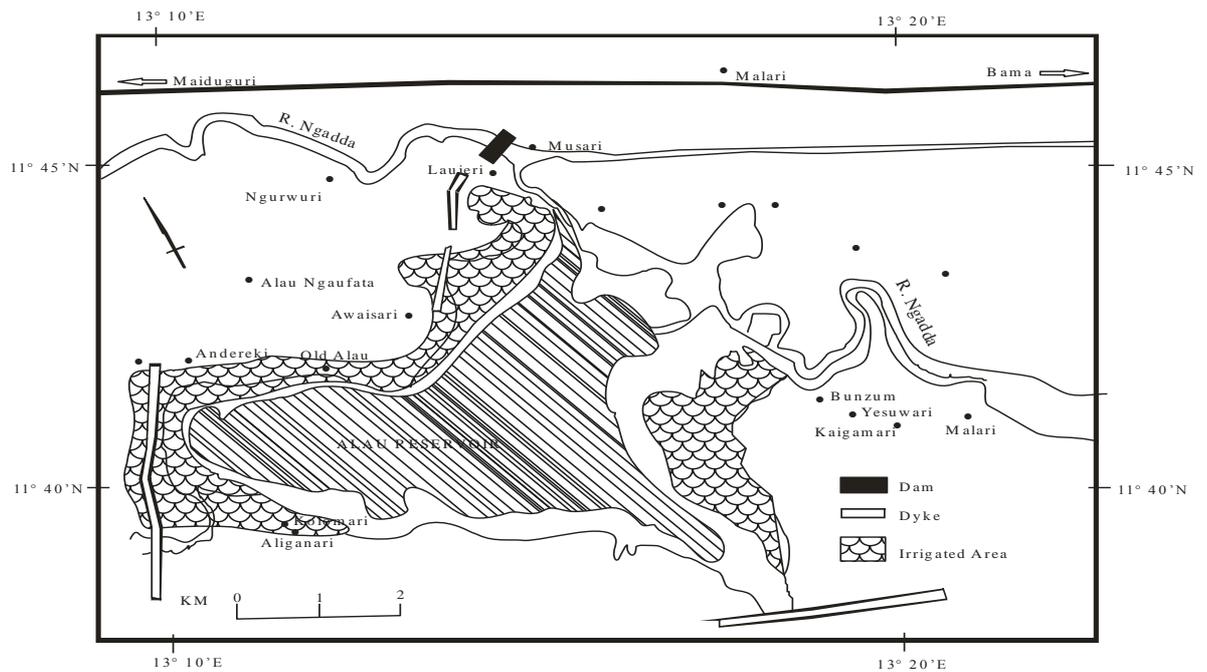
²⁹ This refers to the indigenous method of land acquisition before the influx of immigrants, which was practised by the local people in the communities.

LAKE ALAU

Alau and environs is located about 16 km Southeast of Maiduguri. The entire area lies between latitudes 11°39.870'N and 11°43.779'N and longitude 13°12.917'E and 13°16.930'E (see map 3). The area is situated in the Chad Basin relief region. The maximum relief in the area is about 415 metres measured at Lokojeri where a dam was constructed. The entire area is a plain containing no prominent hill except a ridge (Bama Beach Ridge) to the east of the study area. According to Nyanganji (1996) the Alau Dam was intended as a long term measure to ameliorate the impacts of drought and desertification by conserving water. The dam is further intended to improve and stabilize the rising urban water demands of Maiduguri Metropolitan as well as encouraging rural development. This elevation drops towards the north and the Northwest to less than 300 metres above Sea level. The area is drained by the River Ngadda and runoff flows to the Alau Lake and Reservoir. The River Ngadda itself is seasonal and its flow depends on the rainy season precipitation and upstream flows. Two types of farming are evident in the area. These include rain-fed farming and irrigation agriculture.

Alau area, by virtue of its suitability for rain-fed and irrigated farming as well as availability of water serves as a centre of population attraction. The population density in the area could be as high as 70 persons per square kilometre as against the State average of 38 persons per square kilometre (Census 1991). The population density in the area as in other parts of the State has been on the increase over the years, especially with the construction of the Alau dam, which led to the relocation and in some cases regrouping of some of the settlements.

The location of Lake Alau and its floodplains has had a strong influence on the pattern of settlement in the area. A close examination of the distribution of the settlements (see map 3) reveals a radial pattern around the Lake. Prior to the construction of the Alau dam, settlements such as the Old Alau, Limanti, Old Malchumri, Andereki, Dumba I and II, Meleri and a host of others were located a kilometre or two away from their present locations towards the Lake.



Source: Ministry of Land and Survey, Maiduguri, 1999.

Map 3: Alau Reservoir and its environs

For this study a total of 14 settlements have been visited, which are located at a walking distance from the Alau Lake and its floodplains; and within 15km distance. These include Lokojeri, Ngurwuri, Awaisari, Alau Ngaufate, Kolori Amurti, Malum Burari, Koiramti, Kayamla, Jongomari, Bayaram, Aliganari, Ashemari and Ngadeya though many of them are not located on the map. All the villages mentioned are of Gamergu origin but due to Kanuri migration to the area, the majority of them are assimilated into Kanuri culture.

The study further concentrated around New Alau (Alau Ngaufata), which also has in its vicinity two other resettled villages that serve as wards (Malchumri and Andereki). The choice of this site was as a result of administrative convenience since the village head that oversees the other villages is situated in the village. In addition to his traditional title, the village head is also a civil servant, which enabled his colleagues from the urban centre of Maiduguri to make direct contact with his village for access to land. A lot of people from the urban centre took advantage of their association with the village head as a colleague and friend to gain access to land in Lake Alau. This development made the issue of derived land rights more distinct and interesting in the area than in other areas. The proximity of Lake Alau to the urban

centre of Maiduguri and its population density as well as the construction of a dam also made derived land right arrangements even more visible and clear. In addition, an inventory of some farm plots cultivated by immigrants was undertaken in order to understand the distribution of immigrant farmers in the area (see fig. 25 for details).

Questionnaires were administered to a total of 148 respondents. Ten to twelve elders were also selected for Focus Group Discussion in the three villages studied. In addition 19 respondents were used as key informants for the in-depth interviews. The respondents for the questionnaire were drawn from the three communities with 75 from Alau Ngaufate, 40 from Malchumri and 33 from Andereki villages. Similarly, the key informants were made up of 9 from Alau Ngaufate, 6 from Malchumri and 4 from Andereki. The choice of the respondents for the questionnaire survey was largely done in the field during farming operations adopting both random and purposive sampling procedure based on their knowledge and experience as recommended by most of the people I met on the field. The samples cut across age and gender. Thus, the minimum age of respondents considered was 19 years and women and youth were well represented. Even though most of the respondents were selected while on the farm some of them had no farm plots as can be seen later in fig. 24. The table below shows the distribution of the respondents from the sample communities.

Figure 22: Distribution of respondents in the three villages

	Alau			Malchumri			Andereki		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
60+	8	7	15	2	4	6	2	1	3
40 – 59	35	6	41	5	1	6	17	3	20
19 – 39	17	2	19	26	2	28	9	1	10
Total	60	15	75	33	7	40	28	5	33

Because the choice of the key informants is a critical dimension of the research, purposive sampling technique was used in selecting the key informants. In addition, due to the influence of the key informants as regard the validity and reliability of the data to be collected, their selection was based on their knowledge, experience and influence. A total of nineteen key informants were selected for the study based on a special characteristics mentioned earlier. The majority of them were adults³⁰ apart from the village head and his brother who are youths³¹. Similarly, all of them are full-time farmers born and brought up in the area and have a good knowledge of the area. A few of them have, in addition to their primary occupation of farming, roles with administrative functions such as being village head or ward heads, youth or religious leaders. Seven of the key informants are members of the ruling family i.e. the village head, his assistant (*wakil*), four ward heads and a religious leader (*Imam*). A one-time politician as well as wealthy and influential farmer is also among the key informants. Over 80% of the respondents to the general questionnaire are indigenes of Alau area. There are a few immigrants who have lived in the area even longer than some of the indigenes but are not yet regarded as indigenes when it comes to land ownership. The indigenes in this context refers to those either born in or outside the communities to indigenous families or those that are married to the local people and live among them. There are migrants that have lived for many decades among the local communities but are not considered as indigenous. Women are under represented in the sample because, whilst they take part in rainy season farming on the family farmstead, social convention made it difficult to make contact with them.

Case Study I: Lawan Modu³²

Lawan Modu is a 40-year-old civil servant and village head of Alau village unit. He was used as one of the key informants by virtue of his position as a traditional ruler, contact with government and experience. He inherited the headship of Alau village in 1992 following the death of his father. By his position as the village head, all lands under the deceased village head automatically came under his custody. Thus, he owns an undisclosed number of

³⁰ This category of adults that formed part of the informants were also heads of their respective households.

³¹ Though the village head was in his early twenties and head of the household, his brother was much younger but a member of the household.

³² The real name of the informant is not mentioned in order not to disclose his identity.

farm plots under both rain-fed and irrigated farming in the area. He is a typical example of a giver.

He entered into only two types of derived right arrangements namely borrowing and renting to two people. This is so because of his position as the leader, who is usually expected to offer assistance to his subjects. Because of the several plots under his control he entered into contract with many people both within and outside Alau under both rain-fed and irrigated plots. Under this arrangement plots are lent out to people on a yearly basis for the first few years. But when the relationship between him and the receiver is established, the yearly renewal of contract may not be necessary. There were instances of people living on such borrowed land for over 15 years (well before his ascension to leadership of the village).

As a mark of appreciation and recognition of the ownership of the land, the receivers give out *butu* after harvest in the case of the rain-fed farm plots. *Butu* is however not necessary under the irrigated plots. The informant enjoys this form of contract arrangements as it improves his contact and relationship with his subjects and other people.

Modes of Local Access to Land

There are a number of ways in which people gain access to land for cultivation in the area, among which are; inheritance, allocation of land by the village head, gift, purchase, renting, borrowing, sharecropping and mortgaging. Over the years, there has been overlapping responsibilities regarding land and at the same time traditional institutions have in many cases retained their own legitimacy and authority over land distribution and management in their respective localities. Irrespective of land legislation which bestowed land under the control of Government the local people perceive land as belonging to the overlord traditional ruler. For example, the Kanuri understand land as belonging to the Shehu hence to local concept *chidima* and the respective traditional rulers are entrusted with the land. The piece of land cultivated by a person or the family is seen by them as their farmland (*kulo*) and therefore the user is referred to as a farmer (*kuloma*) and not as landlord (*chidima*). The Gamergu people on the other hand have a different perception of land as belonging to the

different clans. The farmers then consider themselves as custodians of the clans' right to cultivate the land.

Land ownership through inheritance, allocation by village heads and gift are normally associated with indigenes of the area. The children or relatives of a deceased person inherit family land depending on the nature of arrangement at the time. The village head can also allocate land to both indigenes and non-indigenes alike. Land entrusted to non-indigenes, in such a situation, will continue to be used until death after which it can pass on to the children. However, if such a person dies without any child or leaves the community the land then returns to the community pool under the full control of the village head who originally allocated the land to him (as is the case in the customary law cited above). Land under the control of a family or through inheritance remains the property of the family except when their tenure is revoked under the Land Use Act. Land ownership through gift is also frequent among the people but is mostly associated with families and their relations. The head of a family, for example, can in consultation with other elders of the family, decide to give a piece of land to either close or distant relations that are in need of land for cultivation. Such land then becomes the property of the receiver. Some husbands can also decide to present their wives with land as a gift, which becomes their property. This type of gift is not connected with marriage gift, dowry, etc. and the land is removed from the family pool with the authority vesting on the woman. Any land which is inherited from the head of the family over generations is considered as forming part of the family pool unless its new ownership is determined by the reigning head of the family as described above.

Land is also acquired through purchase. This was popular in the past but has since become unpopular³³. This is because of high incursion into local land by immigrants. There are two types of immigrants to the area that purchased land for cultivation. The first category are the ones that come from the urban centres to purchase land for farming whereas the second category are those that purchase land and also settle in

³³ With increasing influx of immigrants to Alau speculation on land rose considerably and brought about insecurity and illegal deals on land, especially from the late 1980s to early 1990s. This situation brought about unpopularity of purchase of land in the Alau area.

the area for farming. Land for agricultural use was purchased for quite small amounts of money some fifty years ago but has since become expensive over the last twenty years because of increasing pressure on land. Today a hectare can attract as much as three hundred thousand naira (approx. £1,200), if it is available. The poor and the average households that form a majority of the community cannot afford to purchase land for cultivation. That is why access to land through derived rights arrangement became more popular and as alternative means through which people gain access to land for cultivation in the areas used for irrigated farming. Nowadays individuals as well as households try as much as possible to keep their land because of the fertility of the soil and high speculation on land; hence they prefer to rent out, or give out, on loan. Village heads tend to lend out land to people because of availability of land under their care.

Land acquisition through inheritance, gift and purchase is always done in the presence of witnesses and also requires the notice of the village head. This arrangement is part of the customary law and is so witnessed because of the permanent nature of transfer of the rights. Land allocated by the village head normally requires the notice of his family members because the communal land is under the control of the family. However, the family of the village head also maintain their own land though it is always difficult to separate the two. These arrangements are to avoid any possible conflict that may arise. Access to land through derived right arrangements includes renting, borrowing, sharecropping and mortgaging which are temporary in nature.

Land Legislation and Policy Implications

The Land and Native Rights Proclamation 1910 and the Land and Native Rights Ordinance 1916 were succeeded by the Land Tenure Law of Northern Nigeria 1962 which declared that all lands in Northern Nigeria were to be native land under the control of the Government. The natives under the Law were conferred with customary right of occupancy, while the non-natives enjoyed the statutory right of occupancy. The current Land Use Act of 1978 vested land under the State Governor as stated in section 1:

“Subject to the provisions of this Act all lands comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefits of all Nigerians in accordance with provisions of this Act” (Land Use Act, 1978).

This implies that communities, families or individuals will have right of occupancy over land, whether occupied or unoccupied by previous owners, whereas the State owns the legal title. The Act, especially in relation to Northern Nigeria, allows citizens the right of statutory or customary occupancy. A statutory right is the one granted by the Governor while customary right is the one granted by the Local Government in a rural area. The Act in this regard clearly indicated that all land in the rural area of Northern Nigeria is under the customary law. It further stated that existing rights on land before the Act should continue to be held by the person concerned whether the right was derived under customary law or otherwise.

The Act was enacted to give the Government compulsory power so as to curb speculations on land, which rise in value, especially in the urban areas. It is also meant to serve as a solution to the difficulties experienced by Government in acquiring land for public use. Furthermore, the Act was expected to remove the impediments experienced on tenurial arrangements for agricultural modernisation through bank loans.

With the enactment of the Act the State provides security for individual or private rights in land since provision was made for compensation for land acquired by the Government for public use. In this regard when any land is taken by the Government from an individual or community there is compensation paid out which in retrospect serves as a security for the landowner.

The customary law on the other hand provides security of land tenure through the family head who, supervises and controls land use by individual members of the family. The family head, as the absolute owner of land under the customary law, ensures security of individual's rights over land through the exercise of rights of management and control. The land allocated to a member of a family can be transferred to his children for them to continue using it provided such rights will not be alienated in any form. Individuals may however acquire absolute rights in land through gifts, through partition of family land or through clearing virgin forest with the consent of the community head. Thus land rights acquired through such means are proprietary in nature and the owner can dispose of such rights without consulting or seeking consent of any member of the family.

The community head controls rights in land that is in the community not occupied by families or individuals. Such land may be allocated to individuals by the community head.

The customary law also guarantees security over inherited land since an individual cannot be disinherited from what is his right (Land Use Act, 1978). In this case the individual has the right to inherit land from the family according to the society's inheritance policy. That is why the individual also adheres to the principle of non-alienation of family land; even where he is involved in non-agricultural pursuits, the land will remain in the family pool. Those that even moved to the urban centres for employment or other things maintain their land in the rural area and it becomes a source of income for them. Some adults that also moved to the urban areas employ labour for the cultivation of their land in the rural areas or give land out under any form of derived rights arrangements. Customary land tenure systems and the formal statutory systems in the majority of West African countries are currently in use for administering land tenure and resource access (IIED, 1999, 7). Consequently, in Nigeria, particularly in the rural areas, customary tenure systems continue to operate in "traditional" ways and retain a generalised tendency to view land and resources as being inalienable. This form of traditional land tenure continues to operate in the Lake Alau region as described above under local mode of access to land. But in

consequence of increased population pressure on land and as production becomes increasingly commercialised, customary system of land tenure in the area became more individualised and rights became more exclusive and alienable.

Although the Land Use Act did not provide any special provisions regarding customary law it has however introduced another form of communal or family ownership of land in the country that is compatible with the customary tenure system. This recognition can be seen in the Act under section 29 sub-section 3:

if the holder or the occupier entitled to compensation under this section is a community the Governor may direct that any compensation payable to it shall be paid –

- (a) to the community; or
- (b) to the Chief or leader of the community to be disposed of by him for the benefit of the community in accordance with the applicable customary law; or
- (c) into some fund specified by the Governor for the benefit of the community (Land Use Act, 1978).

The provision indicates that the Act accepts that land is still capable of being held by the community even though this may mean holding a right of occupancy in the land and not the ownership of the land. The customary right of occupancy is defined in section 50 as the right of a person or community lawfully using or occupying land in accordance with customary law. Similarly an occupier is defined as any person lawfully occupying land under customary law and using the same in accordance therewith (Land Use Act, 1978). These provisions then fully support customary right of occupancy under customary law of the area in which the land is situated. Nevertheless looking at the other provisions of the Act shows that the right of occupancy under the customary law is not so straightforward. For example, the grant of the right must now be by the Local Government as stated under section 6 and section 21 states that no transfer of such right can be effected without the consent of the Local Government (Land Use Act, 1978). But in reality the provisions of the Act

in respect of this transfer is not adhered to by the local communities, not only in Alau but across northern Nigeria. The acquisition of land, according to the local people is equivalent to that of right of residential land where such right can be transferred.

Types of Farming

Both subsistence and commercial farming are practiced in the area under irrigation agriculture and rain-fed farming.

Irrigation farming is practiced along the shores of Lake Alau. The Lake provides the much-needed water for irrigation throughout the year. The practice of irrigation in the area has in recent times been modernized with the introduction of pump irrigation systems. The crops produced under this system are mainly vegetables. They include tomatoes, onions, okra, pepper, garden egg and sorrel. Maize and groundnuts are also cultivated but on a limited scale. The bulk of the crops produced under irrigation farming are meant for sale.

Closely related to irrigation farming is flood recession farming. This type of farming is also popular among the people of Alau. The system involved the raising of crops on the lake floor upon recession of the floodwaters without irrigation. Root crop (cassava) is the primary crop cultivated under this farming system.

In contrast the rain-fed farming is mainly at subsistence level. The crops grown include millet, sorghum and some legumes such as beans, groundnut and bambaranuts. These crops are grown for local consumption. Farm plots under rain-fed cultivation are large and involve the use of the entire family labour force.

The input and output from farming activities for an average household (between 7-10 persons) is outlined in Fig. 23 below. The products are either consumed by the people or sold to generate income.

Farming activity	Farm plots	Input	Products	Output
Rain-fed	Two farms (1.5 acres each)	Labour (less) Fertilizer Transport	Millet Groundnuts Beans	38 (100 kg) bags 4 “ “ 5 “ “
Irrigated	Three plots (0.60 acre each)	Labour (intensive) Water pumps Fertilizer Transport	Maize Tomato Cassava Pepper Okra Onions Others	18 “ “ 380 cartons 30 bags 20 bags 460 cartons 30 bags 7 bags

Figure 23: Input and Output of Household Farming Activities

Irrigation in Lake Alau

Government has introduced a series of schemes at different times to transform the general socio-economic environment and enhance the productive capacity of the whole region. Consequently agricultural programmes managed through extension agents were introduced since the colonial period to reach out to rural farming communities. It is in line with this that government itself was attracted to the lake because of the richness of the soil and the abundance of water for irrigation as well as its proximity to the State Capital. The colonial administration in the mid 1950s acquired a large expanse of land in Lake Alau from the local farmers to practice the different varieties of irrigation farming and supervise the local farmers. The local farmers whose land was acquired by the government were paid compensation, and Government established a sprinkler system of irrigation. Different types of vegetables were cultivated on the government farm. However, the use of the sprinkler system was also initially extended to the local community free of charge for individual use on their own farms at Lake Alau but the scheme later charged a token fee of £7.10s per plot (one hectare is shared between two persons). This new system of irrigation was entirely managed by extension agents employed by the government. The presence of government in the cultivation of vegetables in Lake Alau was to experiment on high yield and enhanced varieties for both use by local farmers and the government. The extension staff also used mechanised ploughs on individual

farm plots under the sprinkler system at the rate of £9 per plot. Although seedlings (enhanced varieties) could be purchased from the officials, individual farmers had the prerogative to obtain their own varieties from other sources. The sprinkler system of irrigation collapsed at the late 60s due to poor management and the decline of the government despite the introduction of new schemes after independence, such as Back to Land, the Land Use Decree, the National Accelerated Food Production Project (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), Green Revolution and the Agricultural/Rural Development Projects (ADPs). Many individual farmlands that existed before the introduction of the sprinkler system were not affected by the new system of irrigation. In fact the sprinkler system only extended to about 5% of the irrigated land.

The traditional shadoof system of irrigation introduced to the area from North Africa since the 1940s and later use of the sprinkler system before the early 70s were gradually replaced by water pumps. The water pumps for irrigation were introduced into the Lake Alau area in 1974 by the then North Eastern State Government. The irrigation system, whether that of the traditional shadoof system or the water pump types was designed in such a way that a large canal (*dale*) passed through most of the farms to serve as a secondary source from which the pump or shadoof supplies water to the farms. Water for irrigation under the different derived rights arrangements is free for use except for contributions made toward the construction and maintenance of the main canals. However, individuals bear the responsibility of constructing the canals to their respective plots.

The introduction of pump irrigation in the region has brought about some changes in the land holding system. This system of irrigation enabled people to acquire a large expanse of land because there was less labour involved in irrigation compared to the shadoof system. Government then renewed its interest in irrigation in the area by encouraging and supporting the farmers with inputs. Hence the use and application of fertilizers on irrigated land was first introduced to the area by the government between 1969 and 1970 and given out to farmers free of charge. As early as 1971 farmers had to purchase fertilizers from the government for 5 shillings per bag, this

was subsequently increased to 7 shillings in the following year. With the enhancement of the farming system many prospective individual farmers, particularly from Maiduguri and environs also developed an interest in the area and acquired plots for cultivation. It was during this period that wealthy individuals and civil servants rushed to the area and obtained plots, especially through renting and borrowing. Individual plot owners in the area, out of ignorance, became enthusiastic because of the high demand for land and happily rented out their plots to get money without cultivating them. People from the town were attracted to the area because of high demand for such products, the profit involved and its proximity to markets in Maiduguri and some Local Government headquarters. Increase in the products resulting from expanded participation in cultivation also made the farmers to extend the marketing networks in 1974 to places as far as Kano, Lagos and Onitsha. The products, mainly pepper, tomatoes, okra and onions are packaged in sacks (pepper and onions) or cartons (for tomatoes and okra) for onward transportation to such cities. The products were initially taken to Maiduguri before chartering Lorries for the long journey. However, as the cultivation increased Lorries went direct from the Alau area for the long journeys to Kano, Onitsha or Lagos, which has influenced the socio-political life of the locality, as we will see in a later part of the chapter. A lorry carries about 200 sacks or 400 cartons with each farmer having up to 20 to 30 sacks. This arrangement, however, stopped after the construction of the dam that took over many farmlands.

An Overview of Stakeholders and Interest Groups' Access to Land

Soil fertility and availability of water for irrigated farming in the Gamergu land attracted the attention of the Borno rulers. The first group of people that were known to have infiltrated the region leading to a chaotic atmosphere of instability was the Sayfawa. The situation at the time was so bad in the region that when clashes occurred between the groups a lot of damage was done, which even led to the killing of Mai Idris Aloomu, one of the most powerful leaders of the Sayfawa rulers in the location of present-day Lake Alau. That was how the area got its name of Alau after the burial of Mai Idris Aloomu at the site. Even though Sayfawa insurgence to Gamergu land was strong, the control of arable land continued to rest very much in the hands of Gamergu chiefs. This is because the Sayfawa rulers could not gain

effective control of the area due to its natural defence mechanism created by the forest, which the Gamergu people took advantage in their successive counter-attacks. Many of the Sayfawa raids were for slave acquisition and booty.

However, as part of its territorial expansion and Islamization the El-Kanemi leadership of the Borno Empire then introduced the fief holding system in the 19th Century and extended it to all the regions under its control including Gamergu areas. The fief holding system known as *chima* was under the leadership of absentee landlords called *chima kura*. People coming to farm or settle in the area, for example, had to ask for allocation of virgin land from the local leaders but the *chima kura* would have to be informed. The *Magira* (the mother of the Mai/Shehu), in recent times, is said to be the *chima kura* of some parts of Gamerguland near the Maiduguri Metropolitan, especially the southern part of the city.

This system of land acquisition was maintained and practised during the British Colonial administration as part of its indirect rule. The introduction of land legislations (see above) in the subsequent years maintained the same system of land allocation since the local leaders continued to distribute and control land in their respective areas. As the old system of land allocation was maintained and people had easy access to arable land the area continued to attract people for agricultural production. This new vigour started in earnest during the introduction of the Operation Feed the Nation programme in 1976 by the then Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo. Individual farmers, especially from outside the Gamergu region were attracted to the area because of fertile land and their ability to access land. Access to land at that time was mostly through purchase and borrowing. The period of the new programme brought about farming on a large scale mainly for income generation. Agricultural production prior to this period was also practised by the local farmers on large scale but did not attract people from both the urban and peri-urban centres. Consequently the Operation Feed the Nation of Obasanjo encouraged farmers at all levels to intensify cultivation of crops for economic purpose and expansion of arable lands in the rural areas. The volume of agricultural production increased immensely and the number of stakeholders also proportionally rose.

The Administration of Shehu Shagari (1979-83) re-organized Operation Feed the Nation and came up with a new scheme called Green Revolution to encourage rural farming activities but people were still attracted to city life and urban jobs as a quick means to make money. Because of revenue from oil, considerable investment went into infrastructure building, predominantly in the urban areas. Government functionaries could not effectively enforce rural agricultural development to the level it should have been hence there was considerable rural-urban migration. Rural migration in this respect led to a decrease in economic engagement. Because of importation of food products and other industrial products food items from the rural areas could not compete. Consequently rural agriculture collapsed to a level where, for example, Gamergu land could not be cultivated due to the low number of people available to participate.

However, the return to governance by the military in the dying end of 1983 abolished importation of most food products and paved the way for intensified agricultural production in the country. Most of the local people that had migrated to urban and peri-urban centres for political and non-farming jobs were attracted by the incentives at their disposal from the government for agricultural production, and therefore returned to their villages to farm on their inherited or acquired land. Many of the high profile politicians and wealthy people that decided to remain in the cities still participated in farming through trusted representatives, especially in areas that are in close proximity to where they dwell. The production was not only at the subsistence level but also for generating income to improve their poor economic conditions. This new vigour also encouraged increased participation of the local community in agricultural production, especially given the interest shown by the returning members of the community. The scale of production and mechanisation therefore, greatly increased. The irrigated land was enlarged and water pumps were used for irrigation. In order to encourage agriculture government also introduced schemes that were meant to contribute towards increased agricultural production by assisting the people, especially those in the rural areas and civil servants, with inputs and soft loans. Among the reasons for the introduction of such schemes were to target the rural populace that made up about 90% of the population and also to bring about

popularity of the military in governance. However, the majority of the farmers in Gamerguland maintained that such schemes did not reach them. Instead, some civil servants that were close to the military benefited from the schemes. Such civil servants received most of the soft loans and agricultural inputs. This resulted in the influx of prospective farmers from the urban centres to the rural areas. Gamergu region by the virtue of its proximity and availability of fertile land for agriculture attracted many of those migrants.

Similarly the Military Administration of President Ibrahim Babangida continued with zeal and even introduced more schemes for rural development in order to cushion the economic strain brought about by the unpopular Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) on middle and lower classes. Among the programmes established to alleviate the sufferings of the people were the Directorate of Foods Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFFRI), People's Bank, Community Bank, National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Better Life (Adeuye1993, IX). The Directorate of Foods, Roads and Rural Infrastructure which was established in 1986 intended to achieve its objectives of rural development through an integrated process designed to raise the quality of life of the rural population on a self-sustaining basis, through an imaginative transformation of the rural mode of production. The agricultural emphasis of the Directorate identified a number of critical programmes such as massive production of improved cultivation of fruit trees and vegetables, aquaculture, livestock production, etc. to ensure self-sufficiency in food production. The emphasis of these schemes on agricultural production, especial to Gamergu arable land was to encourage rural farmers for sustainable production. However, the schemes did not provide the necessary access to inputs such as fertiliser, tractors, improved varieties, etc. Other programmes such as Better Life Programme for Rural Women launched by Nigeria's First Lady Mrs Maryam Babangida to improve the quality of life of rural dwellers, particularly the women, and the People's Bank in 1987 to provide loans to the bottom poor without collateral securities did not change much for the Gamergu rural land. Though the programmes were meant to benefit the rural communities those in the city were the ones that utilised the opportunities where, for example, Borno State was marked in 1992 as the highest in Nigeria in the

area of vegetable gardens by women through the Better Life Programme (Philips 1993, 42).

The Military Administration led by Sani Abacha also came with its programmes for rural development under the Family Support Programme (FSP) and the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP). FEAP for instance, was introduced in 1997 as a grassroots economic programme particularly to meet the needs of the low-income groups of the Nigerian society through the introduction of a simple but functional micro-credit scheme. The primary objective of the programme was therefore, poverty reduction by stimulating appropriate economic activities in the various wards of each local government area in the country with a view to raising the productivity of the people.

These programmes sought to achieve the general mobilisation of the broad farming population through specific strategies, and publicity slogans but failed to achieve take-off of agriculture development. There is at least one feature in common between these programmes, besides obvious fragmentation of projects, there is apparently uncontrollable urge to publicise, as much as possible what the government is proposing to do for the rural areas. The representation of women in the data collected on Alau as well as the level of women's participation in farming remain low despite the series of programmes introduced by the different governments. The emphasis of the programmes was much more on the publicity level rather than on the actualization of the programmes. And where the programmes were implemented the beneficiaries were mainly from the urban centres. According to Uyanga (1993, 169) the Land Use Decree enacted to deal with the problems posed by land tenure system has no systematic policy of integrated rural development. The Fourth National Development Plans which introduced rural development as a plan category placed more emphasis on raising productivity in agriculture through distributing Highly Yielding Variety Seeds within a general green revolution package than on a systematic concern with improving the quality of life and enhancing the economic capacity of rural areas generally. However, the migrant farmers from the urban

centres have contributed toward the economic productivity of Alau region because most of them benefited from the rural development programmes.

Temporary Land Right in Gamerguland (Derived Rights Arrangement)

Derived rights, (IIED, 2004, iii; Zongo, 2004, 54) refer to a system for delegating use rights to describe procedures whereby someone who controls rights of access over a plot of farmland in his own name or that of his family group, grants such rights of use to a third party, on a non-permanent basis and in accordance with specific rules. This arrangement therefore covers a series of different procedures giving access to farmland for third parties, ranging from open-end loans to systems more akin to rental or sharecropping. There are four types of temporary modes of access to land in the Gamergu area. These arrangements are renting, borrowing, mortgaging and sharecropping. These forms of derived rights arrangement do not conflict with the Land Use Act or Customary Law. A derived right arises when a person derives temporary right to land use from the person who has the right of ownership. However, that does not mean that a person with derived right cannot also transfer such right of use to another person. Because of the temporary nature of the arrangements, the parties involved enter into contracts, which then specify certain conditions. The general conditions that must be adhered to in the contract agreements include the prohibition on planting economic trees, digging wells and felling trees on the land. This is because the planting of economic trees require some years to mature or reach fruiting/harvesting stage, which is normally beyond the contract period since economic trees cannot yield within the one or two years of the contract duration. This will normally bring about violation of the contract arrangement and may result in conflict between the actors if the receiver wishes to maintain the land in order to benefit from the yield. On the other hand, felling trees by receivers is prohibited because it serves as a sign of power by land owners over such pieces of land, besides trees are considered as source of shade and in some cases fodder and fruits. Similarly, construction of any form of structure on land under derived rights arrangements is prohibited for the fear that such structures may change the land use

system.³⁴ Since the villages adjacent to the Alau dam expand because of in-migration for farming activities there is a fear that certain farmlands that are in close proximity to the settlement areas may be converted to residential or commercial use.

Figure 24: Number of Respondents under the Institutional Derived Rights

	Age Group	Rented		Borrowed		Sharecropped		Mortgaged		Total	
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Alau	60+	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
	40-59	27	8	5	6	0	0	0	0	32	14
	19-39	19	0	5	3	3	0	2	0	29	3
Malchumri	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	40-59	14	3	4	4	0	0	0	0	18	7
	19-39	7	0	1	2	2	0	0	0	10	2
Andereki	60+	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	40-59	7	4	3	3	0	0	0	0	10	7
	19-39	8	0	3	1	1	0	0	0	12	1
	TOTAL:	82	16	22	19	6	0	2	0	112	35
		98		41		6		2		147	

Key: M – Male; F – Female; T – Total;

The table above displays the distribution of the different derived rights arrangements amongst the sample in the three villages according to the participants' age groups and gender. The distribution shows that people in Alau rented out more land than the other derived rights arrangements. Hence Alau village alone has a total of 80 individuals engaged in different derived rights arrangements, which is about 54% of the entire sample of 147 in the three villages. Consequently, renting has the highest of 55 arrangements making over 68% in Alau village. However, Malchumri has 37 arrangements, which is about 25% of its total frequency. Derived rights arrangements still recorded the highest in Malchumri with a total of 24 cases. Andereki on the other hand has the least number of arrangements with only 30 cases recorded making about 20% of the entire derived rights. The frequency further shows that people between the age group of 40-59 recorded the highest number with Alau having 46, Malchumri 25, and Andereki having only 17 respectively. The distribution further shows a total of 98 arrangements (66%) under renting in all the villages. 16 of the

³⁴ There is the fear that the land use may change from that of cash crop or subsistence farmland to that of residential or other form of commercial use.

arrangements are by women. Borrowing has a total of 41 cases, which represents over 27% of the total arrangements. Furthermore, sharecropping has 6 recorded cases and mortgaging with only 2 cases. When this table (fig. 24) is compared to the table in fig. 22 we discover that some people were engaged in the cultivation of more than one farm plot whereas some had lost their plots completely. The number of men in Alau according to fig.22 is 60 compared to the number of plots cultivated by men in fig. 24 which stands as 62. In this case there are two men that have two plots each. But the situation of Malchumri and Andereki villages is different because the number of men contacted is more than the plots cultivated. This occurred because out of the 33 men that responded in Malchumri 5 have lost their plots as a result of uncompleted contract arrangements. This situation resulted in the number of plots cultivated by men in Malchumri to 28 plots. Similarly, 4 men lost their plots to flooding in Andereki and two men also had uncompleted contracts which resulted in the termination of the agreement. The number of plots cultivated by men from Andereki thus stands at 28. The case of women was not that different where, for example 15 respondents from Alau cultivated 18 plots. 3 of the 15 women cultivated two plots each whereas the remaining 12 had one plot each. Malchumri had 7 women respondents where two of them had two plots each leaving the rest with one plot each. 3 women from Andereki cultivated 2 plots each and 2 had a plot each which makes the number of women from Andereki, according to Fig. 22 to 5 and the total plots in Fig. 24 cultivated by them to 8.

Renting

Renting is considered as a form of derived right arrangement applied to both rain fed and irrigated farming. Rented irrigated plots normally expire in August each year when the river sets into the area. Contract arrangements that involve renting require the receiver to pay some amount of money to the giver on a yearly basis. The contract is renegotiated yearly in order to reassure the ownership of the giver and to avoid conflicts between the parties involved. The actors under this kind of arrangement are mostly people who are not related or hardly known to each other. Such an arrangement is made during clearance of farm plots and payments made at the beginning of the rainy season. The amount paid as rent on a farm plot is variable depending on plot size and quality of land. There are differences in rent on farmlands

under rain fed and those under the irrigated system. Irrigated (*fadama*) farm plots are generally smaller and more expensive, because of the income generated on such plots even though they are more labour intensive. For example, the amount generally paid as rent for a small farm plot of about 100 square metres (1/10 of a hectare) under the irrigated system ranges between 2,000 — 3,000 naira. Such plots are expected to generate an income of about 15,000 — 25,000 naira during the cropping season depending on the type of crops cultivated and input provided.

It is interesting to note that there are some people who rent out some plots and also rent in a plot or two. This situation arises, especially when such person has rain fed (upland) farmlands but has no irrigated plots or vice versa. It may also happen when there is inadequacy in any of these types of farmlands. Indigenes, like immigrants, also rent in farmlands due to the quality of the land, especially if their own farmland is of poor quality.

Even though a plot is rented and paid for it is customary to give one tenth of the harvest (*butu*) to the owner as a mark of appreciation and also to re-insure the owner's right over the land. *Butu* is also admitted as a strong evidence of ownership of land in courts during disputes. This kind of arrangement is compulsory with rain fed cultivation but is optional under irrigated farming.

Borrowing

Borrowing on the other hand is commonly practiced among trusted acquaintances/friends and relations as a form of assistance to supplement their earnings. Women also borrow land for cultivation from their husbands or relatives but do not give *butu*, as is the case with other parties. The woman can however, use some part of the yield in the house. New arrivals to the Alau community also borrow land from the respective ward and village heads. This arrangement also requires annual renewal to ascertain the authority of the ownership over the plots. New arrivals, however, keep their plots while resident at the community but must relinquish them when migrating from the area or when they die. Under the borrowing derived right arrangement the receiver does not pay any money but is expected to

give out some portion of the yield to the giver as a sign of appreciation and at the same time signifying authority of the owner. This arrangement used to be the most popular derived right in the past until the 1980s when it lost its popularity to renting. This was partly as a result of population increase (both natural increase and due to immigration) as well as the increasing importance of the *fadama* land. The most serious reason for loss of its popularity is the increasing abuse of the privilege by the receiver. For example, one of the village heads lent out his land to somebody in the urban centre of Maiduguri, but was shocked when some people came to request for his endorsement for the same land as sign of purchase. It was then that the village head discovered the abuse and took control of the land. The case however, went to the court and the judge ruled in favour of the village head. The receiver has now appealed the case in the High Court of Appeal. Many similar cases are heard in the urban courts, which mostly require the respective village or ward heads to appear as witnesses and if written contracts are available then they are admitted as evidence. The court sittings are usually lengthy and tedious. On many occasions, defendants or appellants in poor financial conditions cannot afford to pay court or lawyers fees. In many cases they are forced to withdraw because of high demand for bribes. Some of the conflicts involved might have been in connection with inter-communal boundary disputes that may require a series of court proceedings and considerable delays as a result of related pending cases.

Sharecropping

Sharecropping has two different perspectives depending on the nature of the arrangement and the people involved. Contract arrangement that involves the landowner as a partner; requires the other partner(s) to contribute water pump (for irrigated farms), fertilizer and labour, in addition to seedlings provided by the landowner. The products are then equally shared among the partners. Another form of sharecropping brings together two or more people that rent land to cultivate. All the inputs under this type of arrangement are shared equally between the participants. The income from the products is equally shared under any of the sharecropping arrangements irrespective of the level of contribution made by the partners. The products are marketed by any or all of the partners and the proceeds are then shared.

There are few individuals that practice sharecropping because it requires a certain level of understanding and honesty among the partners.

Mortgaging

This type of derived right normally takes place when the mortgager is in financial distress and wants someone to help him out. The financial distress may be as a result of marriage or other forms of social responsibility that may require some money. The mortgager usually initiates the contract. The amount involved in this situation is large but not above the estimated value of the land. Such an arrangement is made when the mortgager requires some capital as a take off for investment or cultivation of rented or his own farmlands, which cannot be realized by renting out the land. The agreement clearly specifies the duration and the mortgager cannot cancel it before the end of the contract period even if the amount involved is paid back. The arrangement is usually not less than two years in order to enable the mortgager to cultivate the farm for some period that may be of profit for him. This is necessary in order to allow the mortgagee to realize some benefits/gains from the mortgaged plot. Some elders normally witness the agreement between the parties. However, people also mortgage their farms in order to get capital for investment.

Although figure 24 detailed the number of respondents under the derived rights they are nonetheless indigenes and settled immigrants in the three selected villages. However, the following figure 25 will present the number of plots cultivated by immigrant farmers. Detailed information on the immigrants was not obtained because the lots were randomly identified without even prior contact with the immigrants involved. The information presented here is to portray the influx of immigrant farmers in the area. The information did not also include purchased farmland by immigrants because such farms are not categorised as contracts under derived rights arrangements.

Table 25: Farm Plots Cultivated by Immigrants

	Rented	Borrowed	Sharecropped	Mortgaged	Total
Maiduguri	60	9	5	-	74
Other towns	25	4	4	-	33
TOTAL:	85	13	9	-	107

The table above indicates a total of 107 farm plots being cultivated by immigrants under derived rights contract arrangement. Immigrants from Maiduguri number a total of 74 out of which the majority numbering 60 are involved in rented plots with 9 borrowed plots and only 5 sharecropped. People from peri-urban centres such as Bama and Konduga numbered 33, which involved 25 on rented plots and 4 each on borrowed and sharecropped farms. The random selection of the immigrant plots did not show any contract arrangement that involves mortgage. The table further indicates that immigrants are mostly associated with rented plots where this sample show 85 of the 107 plots is linked to renting arrangement. Borrowed plots have a total of 13 and sharecropping only has 9. This table will explain more on the discussion about the frequency of the different derived rights associated with immigrants.

Contract Arrangements

It is observed that the Lake Alau area and other irrigation sites in Gamerguland attracted a number of indigenes and immigrants who are involved in different types of contract arrangements in the area under the derived rights arrangements because of their temporary nature. Such contracts involve the cultivation of rain-fed and irrigated farmlands.

Contract Arrangement under Rain-fed Farming

The cultivation of rain-fed farmlands is seasonal and occurs only during the rainy season. Contract arrangements under this type of farming system are determined by certain factors. Uncleared or abandoned farmlands, for example, are usually acquired through borrowing or sharecropping. Such farmlands require intensive labour for clearing and ploughing, which discourages other forms of derived right

arrangements, especially that of renting. The ploughing may be hand-hoed or mechanised depending on the size of the farm and the ability of the parties. Money can be used to hire labour for clearing borrowed land that could have been used for renting partially cleared plots. Landowners who have uncleared plots are aware of the low rates when renting out. In such situation the landowners may enter into sharecropping contract agreement since the partner provides the labour. Thus a partner in this type of sharecropping system gets more profit than under renting arrangement because of the large size of land and contribution from the landowner.

Case Study II: Bukar Usman³⁵

Bukar Usman, a 56 year old retired civil servant, politician and now a farmer was born in Gulumba (Bama Local Government, Borno State). He came to live in Alau 25 years ago. He first came to the Alau area as a civil servant in the early 1960s. His service as an agricultural extension worker enabled him to understand the farming and land tenure systems in the area. He was used as one of the key informants in this study. He has eight children, five male and three female. The two female aged 15 and 19 years old are married. The family has four farmlands, which he purchased from different individuals. Two of the farms are irrigated while two are upland farms. In addition to the four farms, which he owned, there are three other that he acquired for temporary use through renting and borrowing in order to have enough plots for the family. He cultivates the three plots he acquired. Out of the four farms he owns through purchase, one upland farm is rented out to someone else while he sharecrops one of the irrigated farms with a partner. His wife has her own separate farm, which she inherited from her father. She has been cultivating the farm since she inherited it some nine years ago and the income is for own use. The eldest son helps the father on the farm alongside labour hired by the father. The younger children help with the small provision shop. He is a typical example of a receiver as well as a giver of land under the derived rights arrangement. This was made possible as he gained ownership of land in the area through purchase in addition to the ones he rents in or borrows. As a receiver, the

³⁵ The real name of the informant is not disclosed in order not to reveal his identity.

informant has been renting land for cultivation under both rain-fed and irrigated farming. The village head rented out the land for rain fed cultivation to him for over 21 years now, which measures about 4 hectares. The rent charges settled on annual basis varied over the years. The first year, in the mid 1980s was only 30 Nigerian Naira. This value has now risen to about 5,000 naira per annum over the same plot of land. Although the rent charges had increased several folds over the years, the output from such farms is quite appreciable. The crops grown on such land include millet, cow pea and guinea corn. The rented land from the village head is among the few rented large farmlands in the locality due to recent increase in demand for such land and increased fragmentation of land.

As a giver, he enters into three types of derived right arrangements on the land he purchased under irrigated farming namely sharecropping, borrowing and renting. Plots are divided into sub-plots, their sizes being marked on the requirements and ability of the receiver. Sub-plots range in sizes which are estimated to be between 0.125 to 0.50 hectares. Under sharecropping arrangement he provides the land, water pump and fertiliser while the partner provides the labour. The output from the farmland is shared equally between them.

He equally lent out a plot of irrigated farmland to one person. Under this arrangement the receiver does not pay anything and is not compelled to give part of the harvest to the owner. He is however, expected to show appreciation in kind during harvest. The contract arrangement is for one year.

Finally five of his sub-plots are rented out to some individuals who mainly come from Maiduguri. The rent charges depend on the plot size and location. Up to 5,000 naira is charged for a plot size of about 0.25 hectares. Rents are paid in advance during land clearance following the harvest of rain fed crops.

Farm sizes under rain-fed farming are larger because of the types of crop cultivated and the availability of land. Large rain-fed farms are mainly associated with sharecropping and renting contract arrangements that involved immigrants from the urban centre. Most of these immigrants acquire their land through renting because it is the fastest and easiest way of gaining access to large expanse of arable land in the

area. Most of those involved in sharecropping arrangements are indigenes sharecropper tenants that are close to the farmlands since the partner under such arrangement is required to carry out his responsibility of looking after the farmland. Sharecropping arrangements with the land owner as a party rarely break apart because he is in a position to take over if the partner fails in providing labour due to illness or lack of money. The landowner then recovers the value of his input from the yield or proceeds before sharing with the partner. This research did not come across any totally failed contract arrangement involving sharecropping. However another form of sharecropping is much more flexible since the partners rent a plot and share the labour equally.

Even though the principal crops cultivated under rain fed farming are millet, maize, guinea corn and beans the size of the land, in some instances, also determines the nature of the crop to be cultivated. Large farmlands influence the cultivation of sorghum because of easy storage and the availability of a market when harvested. Such crops are for income generation. Some portions of large plots are also used for cultivation of crops such as groundnuts, and vegetables, which are mainly for subsistence. Due to the large size of rain-fed farmlands the labour input for both the individual and family is very high. However the rainy season coincides with school vacations hence allowing the family to take advantage of the presence of the children to contribute toward the labour pool. In such a situation the difficulty of coping with expensive labour is sometimes reduced to a bearable level.

Women in Alau have equal access to land through derived rights as their male counterparts. However, the derived rights common among the women are renting and borrowing. Sharecropping and mortgaging are not popular among the women. Women that practice this type of work are mostly elderly and middle aged. They are mainly engaged in rain-fed farming. In such a situation, women can acquire large farmlands for cultivation of crops like millet, maize, sorghum, beans, etc. This type of farming system is cheaper and easier to practice since they can hire labour to cultivate the land. The output from the farm is their personal resource which can be sold and the proceeds used for other purposes. The men/husbands have no right over

such products from the women's farm. Women do not usually cultivate irrigated plots on their own because of the heavy labour and marketing involved.

Contract Arrangements under Irrigated Farming

Derived rights arrangement on irrigated plots give the farmer a variety of choices for the types of crops to be cultivated. This is because of the many types of crops associated with irrigation farming in the area. The soil fertility and abundant water for irrigation contribute immensely to the quick harvest of yields without many hazards that are usually associated with farmlands in other areas. Since irrigation farming is mainly for income generation, the types of crop grown are dictated by the input, type of contract arrangement and market. For example, the sharecropping contract arrangement between a landowner and a partner is mostly associated with crops that require intensive labour and input. The types of crop that are classified as requiring intensive labour and input are maize and cassava. These two crop types require more time to reach harvest and, especially for maize, involve series of preparation stages before marketing. These stages are laborious hence in this case require the effort of men and in the case of cassava uprooting tend to take most of the labour. It is in this regard that landowners with low income that have large expanse of land enter into sharecropping arrangements. Such landowners will normally look for individuals in the community or immigrants that agree to become partners and are ready to contribute or pay for the labour. This does not however imply that there is a pool of waged labour that is on the alert for any of such landowners that will fall into this category. This is more a condition that a landowner may find himself in and is willing to look for a partner that will agree to sharecrop with him. The research discovered that labour connected with sharecropping may be hired by the partner or may involve his family members, especially the children. During this irrigated farming season schools will be in session hence making it difficult for parents to seek contribution of the children to supplement cost of hired labour.

The growing of vegetables like sorrel, okra and pepper are largely associated with land under borrowing and gift contract arrangements. The understanding is that people who are linked with the two derived right arrangements are mainly poor or low-income earners that cultivate small pieces of land. Such farmlands are usually

cultivated without hired labour because of their small sizes and poverty of the people. These types of crops sell very quickly because there is demand for them.

On the other hand the type of crop grown on rented land is determined by the availability of highly profitable market. Hence people cultivating on rented land want to get their money back with high profits since they engage in farming for economic reasons. In this regard such people conduct market surveys of the different crops before even engaging in their cultivation. Experienced people in the business are consulted for advice on the types of crops that are on demand. For example, tomatoes and pepper bring a lot of money, especially during the dry season but also comparatively to those produced in other areas of the State. The prospective farmer then projects the level of water sufficiency in such areas that are usually predicted locally based on the level of rainfall for the year in order for them to anticipate the size of yield coming from those areas.

Mortgaged land and other types of farmlands in the area do not necessarily determine the type of crop to be grown. Other things that may influence the type of crops to be cultivated include water, fertiliser and the soil. Those crops that require more water will mean more labour in irrigation farming because of continuous watering of the crops. Irrigated farms also require additional labour such as manual weeding.

Irrigated plots either small or as large as a hectare (*nduwu*) or more than a hectare (*kamangre*) may influence the type of crops to be cultivated. Small portions of plots that are usually carved out of large farmlands are used mainly for vegetables like tomatoes, pepper, okra and sorrel. These types of crop reach harvesting quickly and can be harvested several times. The people then tend to be engaged in the farms continuously, even though they are small, and may be engaged in farming for as long a period as others in large farms. Continuous harvesting engages the farmer in active cultivation for a similar duration as other types of crops such as millet, maize or sorghum that are cultivated over a long period. Those with large farmlands usually practise intercrop farming to enable them to harvest different crops for marketing. Intercrop farming is practised in some instances because of unpredictable markets for

some of the products. Those with large farmlands that have different soil types also practise mixed farming on the appropriate locations. Cultivation of maize and cassava are mainly associated with large farmlands. Some people that have large farmlands or those that have more than the number they could cultivate usually lend out or rent out portions or some of such land to other people as in the case of Alhaji Gulumba above. This practice is carried out among the people because of generation of some income or to avoid leaving the land uncultivated.

The Rivers Yedseram and Ngadda as well as Lake Alau play a major role in irrigation farming in the area. Although the use of the water from the Alau dam for irrigation is free of charge its proximity determines or influence the nature of derived right arrangements and the crops to be cultivated. The nature of the proximity to the water body itself is two fold. Firstly, land that is close to the water body during the rainy season tend to attract fewer people because it is susceptible to flooding as a result of likely rise of the water level by the river banks. Such farmlands involve the risk of losing to flooding and usually borrowed out to people in dire need of land or are rented out at a very low rate. Those engaged in the cultivation of such land bear the risk involved during flooding.

However, farmlands that are close to the water after the rainy season attract high rents because the water recedes to allow more land for cultivation. This can contrast with early dry season irrigation farming, which may require labour in digging canals where the plants require constant watering as opposed to flood retreat.

Labour

The practice of communal help during weeding and harvesting was popular under the rain-fed farming, which attracts extended family members and close friends. This practice is locally known as *surwa*. However, the practice has lost its popularity in recent years because of agricultural mechanization and use of hired labour.

Recruitment of labour for farming varies considerably in the communities, ranging from those recruited from the urban/peri-urban centres by the immigrant farmers and

those sourced by the local people from amongst themselves. Labourers are easily obtainable, especially during rain-fed farming season where they can be found in different locations in Maiduguri or the peri-urban centres adjacent to the Alau region. Labour is always negotiated within certain parameters that guide the payment. First and foremost, the farmer should determine whether to pay on a daily basis or for the entire farm. Secondly, in negotiating the labour other important factors also need to be determined such as transportation, feeding/shelter, implements, etc required by the labourers. The provision of these items will therefore dictate the price for the labour. The local people, on the other hand, either get labour through communal participation or hired labour. There are not many labourers available in the communities but the local farmers do make use of the opportunity of the presence of labourers in their vicinity that were brought from the urban centres by immigrant farmers to work on their farms. The local farmers then negotiate with such labourers after they have finished working on the immigrants' farms.

Mechanised labour is also used in the Lake Alau area where tractors are hired from private individuals and Government establishments to plough farmlands. Tractors are always difficult to get and the amounts being charged are very high compared to local labour. The use of water pumps is another form of mechanised labour to replace the shadoof manual system. Since water pumps are used to irrigate farmlands with an interval of three or more days many people take the advantage to hire out to those that do not own water pumps. There is a general understanding and plan by which those wishing to hire water pumps get them in turns without affecting their irrigation timing and those of the pump owners. There are also people with water pumps but who have stopped irrigation farming and hire them out in order to generate money. The amount paid for hiring water pumps depend on certain conditions. A pump can be hired on the condition that the hirer will take care of the maintenance such as fuel, and changing the oil (depending on usage). It is also possible to hire the pump where the owner will take charge of the maintenance.

However the level of women's involvement in irrigated farming is in the harvesting of products such as tomatoes, okra, pepper, etc on other people's farm for N20 per day. In addition to the N20 daily pay they are given a small part of whatever they harvested at the end of the day's work.

Socio-Economic Implications of Contract Arrangements

Contract arrangement under whatever form and condition of derived rights arrangements have some social and economic implications on both the giver and the receiver. In the first place it creates new relationship or friendship between landowners and receivers. The parties may not have met before but the issue of land brings them together. The contract arrangement may also strengthen existing relationship between parties, which might even lead to intermarriages, naming of one's child after partners in the contracts. It is also a medium through which ideas and innovations get spread from the urban centres to the countryside or vice versa. This is beneficial to the landowners as such innovations improve their agricultural production. There are also assimilated Kanuri and some other ethnic groups into Gamergu culture after long period of residence among the Gamergu and as a result of intermarriages. The individual Kanuri being assimilated by the Gamergu also associate with the traditions of the people through conscious participation and identification with certain aspects of the culture and rituals. Because of Islamization of the Gamergu people such Kanuri converts tend to identify with their Islamic tradition but are also conscious of Gamergu traditional beliefs such as taking part in *həle* and *zawada* ceremonies. This has given such converts to have a sense of belonging among the Gamergu and carry out such cultural duties as prescribed or demanded by the tradition such as taking part in the annual *həle* festivity and oath taking ritual *zawada*.

Furthermore, the contract arrangements (renting, borrowing, sharecropping or mortgaging) have some economic gains. Amounts realised on land rented out to tenants could, for example, be used as inputs to the development or cultivation of other plots. That is why all payments are made at the beginning of the farming season (rain fed or irrigated farming). Under the borrowing contract, the economic gain is in terms of the issuance of the *butu*. In sharecropping the gain is in terms of fortune or risk sharing by the partners in the contract. On the other hand mortgaging allows for the mortgagee to solve his pressing problems at the time of need, and the mortgager to use the land until the contract is redeemed. It is the prerogative of the mortgagee to repay the debt, so long as this is not done then the mortgager will

continue to cultivate the land. There were situations in the past (though the exact time and those involved could not be remembered by my informant) that mortgage contracts were violated and the mortgager having taken possession of the land after long period of mortgage and death of the principal mortgagee. That is why in modern times contract arrangements are set out with clear conditions and witnesses.

Even though the case of Alau could be seen in the context of modernisation of agricultural activities certainly the availability of fertile land and the prudence of the Gamergu people in farming activities heavily contributed toward attracting immigrant farmers to the area. There are other arable areas that are even more recent than Alau yet do not receive influx of immigrants in such large number for agricultural purpose. The Yau irrigation scheme is a typical example of a modern agricultural unit with a large land area but few immigrant farmers. Modern agricultural production in areas that attract immigrant farmers such as the case of Alau, have diversified social relations between the aboriginal Gamergu and Kanuri settlers. The relationship developed from a hostile posture to that of family relations over the last century. Even though the situation could be classified as relatively uneven across the region many of the farming communities that have witnessed influx of immigrants maintain good relations between the groups. There are many remote Gamergu areas that did not witness such a level of influx of immigrants hence maintain their traditional values and there is hardly any inter-marriage with other ethnic groups. Because of various factors mentioned earlier that contributed at different times, to the increased influx of immigrant farmers in Lake Alau, there were growing inter-ethnic relations among the communities through inter-marriages. It has become obvious that in such places both Gamergu and Kanuri women are attracted to men of both ethnic groups. This situation became apparent due to the assimilation of the Gamergu population in the region. Those assimilated Gamergu have since assumed Kanuri identity, which makes them tolerable to the Kanuri settlers. Marriages between the two groups also enhanced further acculturation of the Gamergu society as well as increased ethnic relations. These farming communities in Lake Alau associated themselves with Kanuri culture just like most of the peri-urban centres in the region such as Konduga, Yale, Kawuri and Bama that were clearly known to have been Gamergu settlements during the Sayfawa era. Immigrant

farmers from the urban centre of Maiduguri and the peri-urban centres developed trust with the farming communities of Alau that could be said to have resulted in the continuous practice of derived rights arrangements as ways of gaining access to land in the region. On the other hand, the Kanurized Gamergu people of Alau who now assume Kanuri identity welcome their urban and peri-urban immigrants by entering into derived rights contracts to cultivate in Lake Alau.

But in looking at this element of trust and social relations between the Alau community and the immigrants, one could deduce two contributory factors. Firstly, there is the natural aspect of acculturation of the indigenous Gamergu that could be said to have led to the friendly relations with the Kanuri. This has enabled Gamergu men to marry from amongst the Kanuri. Secondly, the rural development programmes initiated and reinvigorated at different times created the urban migration to rural farming communities where the availability of fertile land as well as enabling atmosphere of the rural dwellers exist. This situation has created a relationship between the rural dwellers as givers of land and the immigrants as receivers. The relationship between them has developed from that of economic interest to that of enhanced social relations.

Diversity and Dynamics of the Institutional Arrangements

Renting arrangement as a form of derived rights is the most popular in the area. This is exemplified by the information in figures 24 and 25 where immigrants rented farm plots to cultivate on a yearly basis. The contract that is entered to on a yearly basis is to enable the tenant to cultivate the land within the duration of the contract where the season depends on the type of farmland. Farmlands are categorised into upland farming (rain fed) and irrigation farming. Rented rain-fed farmlands are larger in size but attract less rent compared to irrigated farmlands, which are smaller in size but with higher rents. The disparity in sizes and rents is due to the availability of large expanse of upland farms but unreliable rains as opposed to scarce irrigated land due to dam construction but reliable source of water for irrigation. Both rents are paid in advance before the cultivation season. This arrangement suits those that want to lease

out their upland farms to enable them to cultivate their irrigated farmlands or those that will rent out their irrigated land to invest in their upland farms.

Borrowing on the other hand is a recent practice among relatives, marital partners and acquaintances in order to safeguard the security of the farmlands. This type of arrangement does not attract any charges from the receiver because it is meant to assist friends and relations that are in need of farms for cultivation. Hence those looking for land to borrow normally approach their relations or friends. Landowners may also lend out farmlands to those they can trust and feel are in need of land to cultivate. However, landowners usually screen people that will borrow farmlands from them before engaging in the contracts. Landowners use their connections with relatives and friends to get information about any prospective farmer that approaches them for land. It is often difficult to get the required information about the person but local contacts are in many cases brought in to bear on the process of verification of such intended immigrant farmers. However, many of the immigrants to the area are initially introduced by people known to the landowners or their relations. Landowners can then refuse people that have previously violated other contracts or those that are likely to violate the contract. Consequently people who have good records in the past are most favoured. The arrangement is mainly for short term and involves reviewing of the contract on yearly basis. Upland farms tend to be more associated with this type of arrangement than the other types of derived rights. Prospective tenants also do their homework before approaching any landowner. Most tenants prefer to go through experienced individuals that have contacts with the community and who will be able to provide them with information on landowners that are more reliable to deal with. The prospective tenant would like to deal with landowners that are trustworthy and will not unilaterally terminate contracts before they expire on flimsy excuses. There are landowners that may decide to terminate contracts without following the due process and only tough tenants that know their rights will challenge them and succeed. Newcomers/immigrants to the area may also borrow land from the village head for cultivation, which could be for a longer period of time than those from other landowners.

Sharecropping and mortgaging arrangements are not very popular in the area. Sharecropping is of two types and tends to be associated mainly with people living in the locality. Sharecropping that involves the landowner, as a partner requires him to contribute land and seedlings. Whereas the partner is expected to contribute labour, fertiliser and a water pump for irrigation (in the case of an irrigated farm). The contributions on the part of both the landowner and the partner are not quantified but rather stay at the level of material contribution than the monetary value. The sharing formula of the harvest is half for the landowner and half for the partner. Labour is more intensive with irrigated farming and is less intensive with upland farming. The other type of sharecropping identified brings together two or more partners to rent a farm for sharecropping even though this may not technically be categorised as sharecropping, the local people, however, recognise it as a form of sharecropping. Sharecropping technically implies a landowner entering into farming agreement with one or more person that involve sharing the cost of input and also share the output according to an agreed formula. On the other hand, the local community accept individuals who rent a farmland in order to share both input and output as sharecropping. This arrangement requires the partners to contribute input equally in terms of the monetary value. The products are shared equally after marketing, which is done by both of them, either in turn or together, depending on the crops

Institutional derived rights arrangements have significantly changed over the last few years. Though some of the changes are not evidently clear, there are certain areas that one can visualise marginal changes, such as borrowing as a form of derived right that became less popular than renting. Some of the factors that contributed to the change include scarcity of land for cultivation and influx of immigrant farmers. Since the area became a centre of attraction for agricultural purpose, many people from within the State and other parts of the country started to come to the area to take advantage of the opportunity. Hence land became increasingly scarce and landowners introduced rents in order to get income and to control their farmlands more than before. Another factor for the introduction of rents is because of lack of trust and confidence on people that borrowed land in the past. A lot of people claimed ownership of borrowed land or sold it out without the knowledge of the

landowners. Renting of land in the area gradually became popular and the rates increased at the same pace.

Most of those that misused borrowed land in the past were people not close associates or relations of the landowners. Consequently people in recent times lent out their land to people that are relations or close friends and acquaintances.

Irrigation in Lake Alau itself can be said to have undergone a series of changes. According to my informants (Musa, Muhammed, Alau 1998) the area has witnessed some fundamental transformation both in the techniques of irrigation and the landholding system, especially from the 1950s when the Colonial Administration was involved in irrigation farming in Lake Alau. Consequently modernisation and the introduction of new techniques and machinery on irrigated farmlands have also influenced the nature of derived rights arrangements in the area. Introduction of a sprinkler system of irrigation and mechanised ploughing made labour to become cheap and contract arrangements were much more easily done. The sprinkler system has reduced labour requirements on the farm, thereby making farmers to work less on the farm. It certainly enabled people at the time to rent land for cultivation at cheaper rate. The introduction of water pumps to replace the old shadoof system and the sprinklers also increased agricultural activity and intensified contract arrangements under renting without relying much on the Government owned sprinkler system. The new system of agricultural mechanisation was mainly introduced by immigrants who are based in Maiduguri and other peri-urban centres that took advantage of either their positions in Government or their proximity to those in Government to obtain loans and agricultural implements introduced by the Government at different times. Different schemes on the improvement of agricultural production and poverty alleviation were introduced from the period of the Colonial Administration up to 1997 during General Sani Abacha's regime. The increasing number of people going to the area for cultivation was also as a result of increase in demand for the products cultivated in the area.

Some political events have also contributed towards the migration of people into and out of the area that can be said to have influenced the nature of derived rights arrangements. The 1979 Democratic Government had also made people migrate to the urban centres as a result of elections and political appointments. That situation gave temporary popularity to borrowing because many of those that left for the urban centres had left behind their farmlands under the care of their relatives in the villages. This resulted in the availability of uncultivated land, which the local people could not maintain due to inability to clear the land. This then opened the opportunity for people wishing to cultivate land to gain easy access to land for agricultural purposes. However, with the coming of the military in 1983, a lot of people lost their jobs and had to return to their villages. This circumstance coupled with the interest developed by the regime for increasing agricultural activity then made the people return to their farmlands, which made land become scarce. Hence gaining access to land became expensive and renting, once again took regained popularity.

The construction of the Alau dam also contributed to the scarcity of land for agricultural activity in the region. The dam took over most of the arable land around the area and some villages were relocated. This situation made the people move away from their location to new locations with new farmlands that were smaller than their original ones. This gave rise to an increase in the value of land in the Lake Alau area and access to irrigated land, in particular, became very expensive and few people could afford it.

Security/Insecurity of the Derived Rights Arrangements

There are some forms of insecurity attached to certain types of derived rights. In particular, rented or borrowed lands are for short period of time, which renders the tenant without farmland within a short period of time because of the short-term nature of the contract arrangement. All the contracts under rental and borrowing are for one year and may be reviewed thereafter on yearly basis. This circumstance may cause the tenant to stay without farmland at certain times since the landowner may decide not to renew the contract. However, in the case of borrowing farmland, the situation has changed over the years due to some mistrust. This form of derived right

used to be popular in the past but led to land owners losing their farmlands to people that were hardly known to them. This saw the taking away of Gamergu farmlands by immigrant farmers, which was a great concern to the people. Such people that borrowed land for cultivation, which were in most cases for long-term, sold them out or claimed ownership after a certain period of usage. Hence landowners were subjected to tedious and prolonged legal cases. Many landowners have failed in legal proceedings and their plots have been taken away from them due to scanty evidence that most urban courts rely on. In this regard then landowners over time started to lend out land only to people that are their relations or close associates like friends or married partners. Nevertheless, this arrangement did not last either because most relations became untrustworthy as they abused the privilege by claiming ownership after a certain period of usage. This trend led to a lack of popularity of borrowing as a form of derived right in the area. The elders settle most disputes arising within a family set up. However, where such disputes could not be settled at the family level they are then referred to the ward and village heads, which in turn may refer the case to the district head if not settled. This trend of settling disputes normally has to be followed before reaching the court if necessary.

Another form of insecurity is the economic factor, which relates to sourcing of credit by farmers in order to enable them to cultivate their farms. Over the years, many regimes have introduced one scheme or the other that may assist the farmer with credits and inputs but most of them did not work for one reason or the other. The schemes were mainly managed by civil servants who diverted them for their own use while leaving the farmers with empty promises. This trend made it difficult for the farmers to source fertiliser and other inputs in order to boost agriculture, particularly for irrigated farmlands that require water pumps and other accessories. Credits from banks were not easily obtained because of stringent conditions that the ordinary farmer could not meet. Similarly most prospective farmers that had no capital could not afford to rent farmlands because of the high rental charges. Those that could manage to rent then faced the problem of affording inputs for farming. Hence those that resort to borrowed land could not feel comfortable because small farms yield little economic benefit.

There are a number of measures taken by both parties to secure the contracts. The one tenth (*butu*) of the yield given to the landowner by the tenant is a form of security for both parties because the landowner feels comfortable since it reassures ownership of the land. The tenant on the other hand, believes that by meeting that obligation the landowner may have confidence in him in order to renew the contract. Those that rent land ensure prompt payment of their dues so as to also assure themselves of getting their contract renewed. Furthermore, the security of the tenant is assured when he meets the conditions of the contract. Tenants that did not meet the conditions laid out in the contracts are likely to lose the farmland straight away. Then a mechanism is put in place to remedy the condition. Landowners also apply certain screening devices to choose appropriate partners for the contracts. The kind of people to look out for as partners will have clean records in the past or somebody that is expected to be of good behaviour. New comers may have to go through series of screenings and may have to be introduced by a renowned responsible person. This enables them to sustain the contract arrangement for a longer period without much problem.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has revealed modernisation in the Gamergu farming economy and tools through the expansion of land rights to accommodate the presence of immigrants attracted to the region as a result of prospects of agricultural activity. We are also able to observe the different activities and role played by interest groups in the area ranging from the Borno rulers to the local people and the immigrants in transforming the farming system and the economy. The local community who are known for their agricultural prudence, especially in the economic development of the region, also welcome immigrants by institutionalising temporary land rights system. However, derived land rights in Lake Alau have changed over the last four decades. Consequently agricultural activity increased drastically and even attracted both the government and the civil servants as stakeholders. We have indeed observed that derived rights in the area were not very popular some forty years ago because there was abundant land for the people, both in the locality and those from the urban centres to cultivate. The Alau area as a centre of attraction for agricultural purpose soon became over populated with people from different parts of the country,

especially from the nearby urban centre of Maiduguri. Other nationals from African countries such as Mali, Chad and Cameroon that registered their presence in the area for fishing activity also added to the population density. This situation gave rise to increased demand for land for cultivation. However, due to the influx of people to the area, especially given the opportunity of getting land for cultivation, many of them started to abuse the privilege. Many borrowed farmlands were illegally sold without the knowledge of their owners. In addition, those that planted economic trees (fruit-bearing trees) would want to hold on to the farms for several years in order to gain from the harvest. Such arrangements were not properly explained to the local owners, which also compounded the problems.

The construction of the Alau dam to supply Maiduguri community with water also escalated the problem, which then resulted in the reduction of cultivable land. All the economic trees were totally submerged. The local community had initially thought that the expansion of the water body would enable them to cultivate rice and wheat on their flooded farmlands. The cultivation of rice and wheat was found to be impossible after experimentation because specific species of fish known as *tilapia* destroy the crops. According to the farmers the rice fields are destroyed because the fish eat up the stems of the rice.

Consequently the local people had to retrieve their cultivable farmlands while at the same time pursuing compensation for their submerged farmlands from the government. The people whose villages were relocated have been fully compensated but their farmlands are yet to be compensated despite receipts issued to them by the government. It was only recently (1998) that the Borno State Legislature passed a bill on payment of compensation for people of Alau area whose farms were submerged as a result of the construction of the dam. This could be related to the recognition accorded to customary law on land tenure by the government.

After the construction of the dam, the local community, henceforth became suspicious of immigrants coming to the area to acquire land for cultivation as this could be linked to two main reasons: (1) that there is now less land available for

cultivation compared to the pre-dam period, and (2) that the immigrants could not be trusted any more due to the incidents of the past. That is why in this study a mention of the village head and his relation with the people in the urban centre of Maiduguri is made, especially in his capacity as a civil servant. Quite a number of people from the urban centres, who are fully aware of the situation in the past, would want to re-establish themselves in the Alau area. The local people know most of those that found their way back to the area for agricultural purposes. Despite the reduction in farmlands as a result of the dam construction, people continued to practise irrigation farming. The farmlands increase during the dry season because of the recession of the water body. The upland farms, on the other hand, were not seriously affected by the dam except for the acquisition of some upland farms for resettlement of the relocated villages.

CHAPTER NINE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

We can summarise the thesis by saying that the Gamergu are autochthonous people that used to occupy the entire area of present-day Maiduguri Metropolitan spreading southward along the River Yedseram down to the plains of the Mandara Mountains. They were also known to have settled in the areas along the Yedseram up to Dikwa. Even though oral traditions have indicated that the Gamergu came to settle in the area at a certain time, the Legend of their origin seems to have been mixed up with that of Mandara. Even though we cannot directly link the findings of Connah's excavation to the origin of Gamergu we however know that at least a tradition have been living there for many centuries. It is possible that the Gamergu could have had some contacts with the inhabitants of Maidbe given that the place was only abandoned in the 18th Century at the time when Gamergu people were known to have settled in the area. My interpretation of the origin of the Gamergu could be linked to that of the Wandala people. The Wandala happen to migrate to the region and met the Gamergu who were an acephalous people. Hence the Wandala that were politically more advanced exerted their leadership over the indigenous group. The Wandala migrants that took political control of the Gamergu then adopted the indigenous language as they still maintain a similar language with that of Gamergu. However, the Gamergu people perhaps have had their traditional belief before the arrival of the Wandala, who then adopted similar belief. Both the Gamergu and the Wandala lived together amicably. Nevertheless the arrival of the Kanuri to Borno put pressure on both groups. The Wandala could not bear the Kanuri pressure and by the virtue of the advanced political organization retreated to the plains of the Mandara Mountains where they founded a dynasty which became strong and economically advanced. The dynasty eventually submitted to the Kanem leadership but maintained its independence as a vassal state of Borno.

The Gamergu were then left to defend themselves against the Kanuri. Since the Mandara group have moved to the plains of the Mandara Mountains the Gamergu were then defend themselves against the Sayfawa and later El-Kanemi leaders

without any central political leadership. This situation has further given the Borno leaders the opportunity to maintain the Gamergu areas as a reservoir for slave raids. Slaves were undoubtedly one of the main sources of income of the leaders of Borno. Although this is a subject of contention among scholars, certainly the leaders of Borno have plundered the pagan tribes of the State in order to enrich their slave force. Even Barth has this to say:

Slaves are the only articles which the conquerors want from the subjected tribes; by carrying into slavery great numbers of them they force them into subjection, and even the tribute which they levy, after having subdued them, consists of slaves (Barth, 1965, 401, vol. II).

Even though the Gamergu people had maintained their ground for so long, some scholars are of the view that it was the intention of the Borno leaders not to conquer them. Brenner, for example, states:

The areas south of Bornu had for centuries been the object of slave raids, and a combination of the desire to preserve these domains for the harvesting of that human commodity, considered as essential to the Bornu economy, and the sheer difficulty of conquering those hilly and mountainous areas had hindered expansion in that direction (Brenner, 1973, 25).

The continuous pressure from the Kanem leaders as a result of their regular raids and campaigns to convert the Gamergu population into Islam paved the way for the gradual assimilation of the Gamergu population. A great number of the population was pushed southward and survived on the borderline of the powerful Borno Empire. The acephalous Gamergu society was then absorbed into the Borno advanced political system. Consequently, Gamergu villages were brought under Borno fief holding system, which were administered by the respective *chimas*, particularly for the purpose of tax collection. This system continued for some time but the *chimas* were replaced by the village and ward heads. The Gamergu then co-existed with the Kanuri people as they were not able to resist the strength and political organization of the Kanuri after being absorbed into the Kanuri political hierarchy.

Consequently, gradual incursion of Kanuri population into Gamergu territory enabled the Kanuri people to tolerate their neighbour to a certain degree, thereby promoting cultural understanding between the groups. As mentioned earlier the increase in the Kanuri population was as a result of ethnic and cultural fusion and diffusion in the Lake Chad area that emanated from the political expansion carried out by the Zaghawa tribes and later by the Kanuri rulers. This has also paved way, over the decades, for inter-ethnic marriages among themselves. Among the most important carriers of acculturation are education and urbanization (Mishra et al 1996, 113). The urbanization of some Gamergu settlements and the influence exerted on settlements in close proximity to the urban centres has contributed in a great measure to the acculturation process of the Gamergu. Indeed the role played by Islamic and western education in the acculturation process cannot be over emphasized. Among the reasons for Kanuri insurgence into Gamergu communities was to destroy their pagan activities and convert them to Islam. The Gamergu were known to be strong believers of their traditional faith and had resisted Kanuri attacks for many decades where, for example, Idris Alooma (one of the strongest rulers of the Sayfawa Dynasty) was said to be killed by a Gamergu person. The introduction of formal schools to the community has also contributed toward the acculturation process where Gamergu youths that travel to the urban centres to seek further western education end up taking residence there. It is this form of cultural fusion that culminated into Islamization of the majority of the Gamergu population. In this regard most Gamergu have renounced their traditional faith and have adopted the Islamic faith. The process of public renouncement of their traditional faith started at the time when Kanuri village heads controlled Gamergu settlements and having been incorporated into their political structure. It could be observed as enforcement based on directives given to the respective village heads {who were themselves appointed by the Shehu} by the Shehu of Borno. Since then Gamergu started to practice Islamic faith with mosques sited in most large settlements of Gamergu people. Gamergu Islamic scholars also started to emerge and engaged in educating their populace. The attitude of Kanuri people toward non-Muslims is very clear for many years, which is also reflected in the pattern of urban structure of most of its cities. In the study carried out by Kawka (2002, 169) the urban centre of Maiduguri has been a multi-ethnic community with many non-Muslims inhabitants. Such non-Muslims comprise

Christians and followers of traditional beliefs whose population are distributed in different wards of the city but further away from the Shehu's palace (the seat of the traditional ruler). This implies that those wards that are closer to the Shehu's Palace are the ones that are close to the aristocratic family and the religiously learned people. But those that are considered non-Muslims are discouraged from settling closer to the Palace hence keep further away from the centre. This form of distinction of the urban population indicated how religious and cultural distance is mirrored in space.

Information gathered from my informants and from the literature portrayed the stateless nature of the Gamergu and how the society looked inward for the survival and identity of its members. The religious leaders together with the elders play a crucial role in coordinating social institutions and the survival of the individual in the society. Gamergu religious practice, which plays an important role in social justice among the people, could be seen as one of the main features of Gamergu traditional culture up to the time when most aspects of its practice started to fade away due to assimilation and the existence of the people as a frontier society. Perhaps given its prime position in the society, some aspects of Gamergu religious practice have survived today and in some situations being mixed with that of Islamic and traditional Kanuri practices. Furthermore some aspects of Gamergu tradition are highlighted in their lifecycle where Gamergu-ness is created and portrayed. The manner in which disposal of the placenta and the umbilical cord of a baby at birth is linked to a person's birthplace and identity. Similarly Gamergu identity can also be linked to the name with which one is identified. Gamergu people used to identify with Gamergu names (see Fig. 2) but due to Kanuri and Islamic influence most Gamergu people nowadays will have a second name to identify with their new Islamic culture. Gamergu traditional marriage is one of the areas heavily influenced by that of Kanuri tradition but inter-clan marriage is maintained by most people to certain degree. Marriage outside ones clan is still favoured and being practised by Gamergu people. Bride-price is an important component within the institution of marriage that portrays Gamergu identity, which could be said not to have been fully influenced by that of Kanuri tradition. The split of the bride-price into two with one part given to the bride in the form of sheep and the other part that goes to the parents of the bride in the form of a cow and Maria Theresa Dollars is another feature of the

culture that is being practised by the people. Even though the part of the bride-price in the form of a cow and Maria Theresa Dollars are not feasible nowadays, it is certain that affordable cash payments substitute such practice. Identifying one with Gamergu-ness among males requires them to undergo two main initiations known as *kyarva*, firstly, at the age of adolescence and secondly, when they reach the age of 40 years. These two stages of initiations allow one to move to another important level of development in the society, where the young adolescent steps into a stage of married life and the man from the age of 40 years enables him to become a member of the decision-making group. The ceremony involved with the death of an elderly person is an equally typical aspect of Gamergu identity that paves the way for ancestor worship. Even though ancestor worship is not particularly practised among the Gamergu of today, it is certainly portrayed in the lavish ceremony accorded to the burial of an elderly person in the society.

We can draw some conclusions based on the information presented in this thesis as follows: In their work on Imperial Ethiopia Donham et al (1980) have emphasized the need to interrelate any study on borderland people to the centre. Understanding the complexity of Gamergu society, therefore, is to situate it in the overall dominance of Kanuri society in the region. The study has brought to light different aspects of Gamergu society that have been influenced and dominated by that of Kanuri culture. For example, the Kanuri leadership has brought about the decentralization of certain political and spiritual structures of Gamergu culture through the introduction of its fief holding system and Islamic values. The Gamergu as an acephalous society could be said to be a contributory factor because of the nature of leadership roles among the people that were not easily discernable. Muller (1985) described the difficulty of explaining the organization of acephalous societies. There was some element of political centralization at the time when the Gamergu were settling with the Wandala people but when the Wandala left the area there was no visible political leader other than the religious leaders. The *Thlikse* leadership recognised by the Gamergu was the political head of the Wandala. There was no equivalent title under the Gamergu acephalous society that could be said to be the political head of the society. Gamergu culture in this context could be said to be “deficient,” “backward,” and “unIslamic” prior to political centralization introduced by the coming of the Sayfawa and Kanuri culture. There was some kind of tension among the people because of the series of

problems related with conversion to Islam, enslavement and incorporation into the Kanuri political structure. Consequently, Gamergu people that were united by their religious leadership found themselves allocated to different village (*lawanate*) and district units under the leadership of Kanuri village and district heads. This new system of political affiliation heavily influenced the decision making procedure of the society and its social justice. The overall political leadership of settlements is now controlled by the village head together with the respective ward heads under the *lawanate* unit. This is in opposition to the earlier control by the spiritual leader *dadathluya* and the respective lesser priest called the *male*. The various councils of elders that form the committee of decision-making in the community are now under the control of the respective village heads (*lawan*), whether he is Kanuri or not. Thus any decision taken by the council is subject to ratification by the village head. Though the clan heads remain active in the community, their influence has been drastically reduced.

With the current cultural awareness being generated among the Gamergu many of their settlements are now headed by Gamergu village heads (*lawan*). There is one particular Gamergu village of Angwala where the present village head is not of Gamergu or Kanuri origin, and is contested by a Gamergu person. There is a wide support from the Gamergu community. This form of awareness is now circulating among the Gamergu community, which could be seen as a new zeal for cultural promotion and political autonomy but also control over resources. This form of awareness and freedom of association with the Kanuri people could be said to have been created as a result of cross cultural interaction of frontier lifestyle and the attraction of Kanuri population to Gamergu fertile land.

Despite the limitation of Gamergu participation in the political sphere of the State their contribution to the economic survival of the area has never been doubted. Even though in Kanuri society the land belongs to the Shehu there is no doubt that the area occupied by the Gamergu was of economic importance. More recently, the abundance of land for cultivation attracted many Kanuri people to the area. This situation of demand for land by the Kanuri in Gamergu area therefore put the latter at an advantage compared to their historical position. The Kanuri are now looking for land to cultivate in the fertile land of the Gamergu. This circumstance opens up for a

new dimension of relationship for better understanding between the people who had previously been aggressive to each other. Hence Gamergu people welcome their Kanuri people to gain access to land for agriculture. The Gamergu in modern times are no longer running away from their Kanuri neighbour but are on firm ground mingling with them and offering such opportunity to invest in their land.

The availability of fertile land and the high population of the Gamergu could have been the basis of their dispersed homesteads as described by Horton, to organize mutual support among households. In this regard effective control of structures within the kinship system is seen as a means to conflict approach (Meillassoux, 1978a, 1978b) where Gamergu arable land has provided high competition among the people and has also attracted migrant farmers. Elders' dominance over the control of economic resources could be seen in the homestead farming system practised within the household where the head tends to supervise both production and the family granaries in which the harvest is stored. The family homestead farming practice among Gamergu communities has open up to accommodate migrant farmers who are attracted to the area as a result of the agricultural potentials of the fertile land. Hence traditional modes of land acquisition associated with the people were enhanced to allow such immigrant to access land for agricultural practice. Access to land on a temporary basis became prominent and therefore paved the way for institutionalisation of derived rights system of land acquisition. This system of access to land became popular even among the Gamergu people where those with insufficient land for agriculture can gain access to land that will provide enough income for the family. Consequently this renewed interest and borderland activity in agricultural practice raised socio-economic activity of the region to its peak. It has also provided for increased cultural tolerance and inter-ethnic marriages, especially between the Gamergu and the Kanuri. There is no doubt that the socio-cultural exchanges and awareness that has been taking place became possible due to this kind of interaction provided by the frontier and agricultural potentials of the zone. This is because frontiers and borderlands are areas of diverse political, economic and cultural systems that provide illuminating insights into processes by which cultures and identities are constructed and negotiated (Wendl and Rösler, 1999, 2). The Gamergu community have therefore taken the opportunity provided by this frontier situation to create cultural awareness and identity among its people and have also

dwelled into political sphere of the region. The majority of Gamergu people can easily identify with their culture and participate in political leadership to promote their identity.

The period before the 19th century for Borno was a region inhabited by a congeries of people, speaking Saharan and Chadic languages, Arabic and possibly others (Seidensticker, 1997, 1), and such people living in diverse and warring conditions cause as a result of the Sayfawa and El-Kanemi State formation. The situation, as we observed earlier, was not peaceful for the non-Kanuri people, especially the autochthonous groups that were constantly being raided where in the case of the Gamergu, for example, were pushed to the borderline and majority of their people being assimilated into the Kanuri culture. According to Seidensticker (1997, 1) the dramatic changes of the 19th century brought about a spectrum of social responses such as discontinuity of settlements, intra- and interregional migration and war, and emergence of new settlements and a new centre for the polity. The creation of internal boundaries resulted in the drastic reduction of the Borno polity where substantive parts of its vassal polities such as Gulfei, Kuseri, Logone, Damagaram, and Wandala were cut off. However, the 20th century onwards brought about awareness among the different ethnic groups in the region where the frontier life, particularly that of the Gamergu people has become a point of attraction for economic reasons.

The freedom offered by the late 20th and early 21st centuries has brought about political awareness among the people hence there are many Gamergu village heads today. Similarly the modern democratic culture has also enabled educated Gamergu people to vie for elected political positions in their locality to represent their people. Consequently there are a number of Gamergu people nowadays being elected in their areas to councillorship positions in their localities to represent their people at the Local Government areas. I had come across one of such elected councillors representing Dogumba constituency in Mafa Local Government.

More so the youth have formed an association in the State to promote their culture and understanding amongst the Gamergu communities. This could be seen as a great move towards the revitalization of their cultural identity after many decades of

subordination and suppression. It could not have been possible to form such an association in the past, talk less of public engagement to identify with their culture.

The acephalous nature of Gamergu society could be observed in view of its uncentralized political system before the Mandara people exerted their leadership on the people at the time when both ethnic groups were living together. Though the author is not able to ascertain the time of the arrival of the Mandara people to the region the Gamergu are known to have been practising their religion which centred on the spiritual tree that a Gamergu prince was believed to have disappeared into (see Chapter 3). Consequently the Gamergu people willingly submitted themselves to Mandara leadership given the prime position of the Gamergu people that have established religious institution in place which they could provide. This form of institutional structure put in place can be situated in the formation of political centralization by Cohen (1978a), Haas (1982) and Service (1975, 1978) where the Mandara leadership controlled the political sphere of the people. However, when the Mandara people migrated from the area as a result of Kanuri pressure to the Mandara Mountains the Gamergu were then left without any centralized leadership.

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