

THE NGIZIM OF POTISKUM: IDENTITY, CHANGE AND PERSISTENCE, C 1600 TO THE PRESENT

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ABSTRACT

The Ngizim are a Chadic-speaking people of Yobe State, Nigeria, widely regarded as the first settlers of Potiskum (Pataskum). Although Potiskum is the largest commercial centre in the state, its history is often written as part of the history of Fika Emirate, which marginalizes Ngizim contributions. This study examines the history, ethnic identity and cultural change of the Ngizim of Potiskum from the pre-colonial period to the present. It adopts a qualitative ethno-historical design. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 purposively selected informants (three palace officials, four elders, three local historians and two Ngizim association leaders) in Potiskum Local Government Area between January and March 2024; secondary data came from published works and archival records, including Fika Division annual reports. The data were analysed thematically. The findings indicate that Potiskum, whose name derives from the Ngizim words pata (forest) and skum (a local tree), originated as a Ngizim settlement founded under Mai Bauya; that the institution of Mai Potiskum embodies Ngizim political autonomy, which was curtailed by incorporation into Fika Emirate and by British rule; and that Islamization, Hausaization and the modern economy have changed Ngizim culture and encouraged a shift from Ngizim to Hausa among the youth. Ngizim identity has nonetheless persisted through the Mai Potiskum institution and the annual World Ngizim Day. The study recommends the documentation of oral traditions, language preservation and recognition of Ngizim traditional institutions.

Keywords: Ngizim, Potiskum, Ethnohistory, Cultural Identity, Traditional Political System, Oral Tradition, Language Shift, Yobe State.

Introduction

Potiskum is the largest town in Yobe State and is reputed to host one of the largest cattle markets in West Africa. Behind its commercial importance lies the story of the Ngizim people, a Chadic-speaking group regarded as the first settlers of the land. The name Potiskum is derived from the Ngizim language. The Ngizim are the dominant people in the area to the east and south of Potiskum, as well as in Potiskum town, which was originally a Ngizim town. Ngizim populations once inhabited parts of old Borno and settled in places such as Ngazargamu, Njimi, Kukawa, Fune, Potiskum, Bursari, Dapchi, Kayari, Ngojin, Zigawu, Damagun, Alaraba, Dawura, Gashua and Fika, and in the old Kano states in places such as Hadejia and Riruwai; some of them have since lost their cultural identity through assimilation into other ethnic groups (Abubakar, 2013). The Ngizim speak a Chadic language, also called Ngizim. This history is contained in a document titled "*Tarikh Marfarma/Masbama*". Palmer (1936) observed that the various forms of the name, though distinguished, seem to denote the same people: N'gizim, Ngujam, Ngazar and N'gissam. In another part of his notes, he states that *Birnin Ngazargamu* was founded by Mai Ali Gaji Dunamani in about 1462, who acquired the site from the Ngizim living in the region.

The earliest stream arrived in the Potiskum area from the west and settled at Ngojin and other places under the leadership of **Mai Jalo** who founded Ngojin in the 16th Century. According to Professor J. E. Lavers, the Ngizim again moved from their main centres in Ngazargamu. They moved south to the Potiskum region where they met earlier migrants that settled at Ngojin. This latter group built **KEISALA**¹ and evolved the institution of **DUGUM AU** or **SARKIN HATSI**. Another group of Ngizim arrived in Potiskum under the leadership of **BAUYA** from Mugni and settled at Yarimaran (eastward to Potiskum town). He ended the menace of Mai Taida who had organized an incursion to Kaisa. There is an argument on the real name of Bauya, because the name Bauya was a traditional title name meaning Flag bearer. Some people are of the view that Bauya named Yarimaran after his real name meaning "Yarima Mamadi"

Over time, the jihad of 1809, colonial conquest in 1903 and the influx of Hausa, Fulani and other groups have reshaped the town into a multi-ethnic city (Brenner, 1973).

North East Nigeria is ethnically complex, comprising Kanuri, Shuwa Arab, Gwaza Bura, Margi, Batcham, Fulani, Hausa, Bade, Bolewa, Gamo and numerous Chadic groups. Among them, the Ngizim occupy a strategic position in present-day Yobe State, with Potiskum as their historic and cultural capital. Potiskum, the commercial centre of Yobe State, is located at latitude 11°42'33" N and longitude 11°04'10" E in the Sahel savannah region of Nigeria. It has an area of 559 km² and a population of 205,876 (2006 census); its postal code is 631. The town shares a common boundary with Fune Local Government Area to the east, Fika to the southwest and Nangere to the northwest, and is situated about 96 km west of Damaturu, the state capital. Because of Potiskum's commercial importance, it became the headquarters of Fika Local Government Area in 1976 when Borno State was created, and later part of Yobe State in 1991; Potiskum Local Government Area was created in 1992, during General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida's military regime, out of Fika Local Government Area (Muhammad-Gombe & Yusuf, 2019).

Potiskum has bustling economic activities, which include the transport (trailer) business and the grains market (kasuwan hatsi), among others. Strangers could easily mistake the town for the state capital. Although Potiskum is not the capital of Yobe State, it is important both as an

ancient centre of power and civilization and as a prosperous modern city in which the average income earner can live comfortably. Potiskum is surrounded by most, if not all, of the Ngizim indigenous villages, such as Ngojin, Garbawa, Fara-fara, Alaraba, Majewa, Nassarawa, Jigawa, Garin Makwai, Badejo, Jumma'a, Talata, Danchuwa, Lai-lai, Bilan-Fusa, Maina Kaina, Zagam, Garin Belgel Mamudo, Garin Mai Baba, Bula, Belgel, Mamudo and Damagum, to mention but a few. Potiskum is the headquarters of the Pataskum Emirate as well as the cultural centre of the Ngizim. Looking far back, Potiskum was a victim of the British “divide and ruin” policy, which led to the downgrading of the indigenes' traditional stool (Brenner, 1973).

In the Ngizim language, Pata means “forest” and Skum means “tree” (Abubakar, 2013). Potiskum is actually supposed to be spelt as “**PATASKUM**” for this is the epithet by which the founding father of this settlement, Bauya, identified his town. Interestingly, British invader, ever so uninterested in proper pronunciation of foreign names, foisted “**POTISKUM**” on this town. Sadly, corrupt version, like the proverbial bad penny, would not go away and has stuck to this day. In fairness to the British interlopers, they were not the only ones guilty of wrongful spelling or pronunciation of this settlement's name.

A pamphlet titled “a brief history of Pataskum emirate,” reveals that another type of this corruption appeared very early in Arabic manuscript collected in Kumasi (Ghana) by Thomas Bowditch, where the name, Potiskum or kuskum’ is listed as one of the large towns on the route from Borno to Onnogoora.’ The pamphlet, issued by the information Division of Pataskum Emirate, further states. It is therefore evident that the use of the name Pataskum and its corrupt form had started as far back as 1817 AD. Just as Pataskum turned out as kuskum, Onnogoora could well have referred to any town in the ancient Kanem- Empire or even beyond. (Cited in Abubakar, 2013)

It was not clear why Bauya named his town as “Pataskum.” According to oral tradition, the town was named after an earlier Ngizim figure. While another source says Bauya looked to the nature of his immediate environment for inspiration. On his part, Babayo observed that the town's name could have derived from a local tree. Interestingly, this view dovetails with the thinking that “the nature of Bauya's environment” contributed to the choice of Pataskum as name of this town. “*Skum*” is a local plant, which all Ngizims hold in high esteem; “*Pata*” means forest or health in the Ngizim language. In ancient times *skum* was used as an oracle, it was also important in divination. For example, people consulted this oracle before setting out on a journey. (Muhammad-Gombe & Yusuf, 2019).

Potiskum was a town where a traditional ruler (Mai Agudun) was hanged by British colonialist over a dubious trial. It was strongly believed that the man's charge over alleged murder was successful to justify the British plot to get the hugely popular ruler out of the way. Some of the written sources say the British first set foot on Potiskum in 1835, however, colonial domination and overthrow got to this town in 1902. In 1993, the then government, reinstated and reaffirmed the stool of Ngizim people after a series of persistence political struggle and critical study of their historical evidence, Alhaji Muhammad Atiyaye was appointment of as Mai Pataskum in August 1993. Sadly, the status of this throne had been degraded to 3rd class in that year, and then the ruler had also passed on after barely two months in the saddle. After his death, the traditional council nominate 3 person to Yobe state government who chose and appointed Alhaji Umaru Bubaram Ibn Wuriwa Bauya I as the 25th Mai Pataskum, a grandson of Mai Bundi 1 OON, ruler of Potiskum from 1902 to 1909. (Yusuf, 2013).

This study covers the history of the Ngizim of Potiskum from about 1600 to the present, with a focus on Potiskum Local Government Area. It examines the origin and settlement of the

Ngizim, the founding of Potiskum, the effects of colonial rule and the merger with Fika, and the persistence of and change in Ngizim identity. The study is significant because it brings together oral and written evidence on a people whose history is usually treated as part of the history of Fika Emirate, and because its findings can inform policy on the documentation of oral tradition, language preservation and the recognition of traditional institutions.

Statement of Problem

Despite their significance, the Ngizim remain under-researched compared with the Kanuri and Hausa. The Ngizim language and its traditions began to decline before independence, when the colonial administration executed the Mai of the Ngizim, Mai Agudun, and, in 1924, moved the seat of Fika power to Potiskum for administrative convenience; Fika had been brought under British occupation in 1903. This led to the collapse of the Ngizim kingdom in the Kanem-Borno Empire.

Today Potiskum old prison and the Duwa Doko (Rijiyan Doka) is a disputed area between the Ngizim and Bolewa due to misrepresentation of facts in government document. It was said to be founded by a horse belonging to one kachallah Bauya Awani, which said to be the first Ngizim king, while it was searching for water to drink. It became a stable source of water and people began to settle around it, which eventually resulted into the establishment of Potiskum town. Existing literature subsumes Potiskum under Fika Emirate (Abubakar, 2013; Yusuf, 2013), which marginalizes the Ngizim. No study provides empirical proof, from oral and archival evidence, that the Ngizim were the first settlers. This study seeks to fill that gap.

Research Questions

- i. What is the origin of the Ngizim in Kanem-Borno?
- ii. How was Potiskum founded by Mai Bauya in 1808/1809?
- iii. How did the colonial merger of Potiskum into Fika Emirate in 1913 affect the Ngizim?
- iv. Why did the resistance of Mai Agudum lead to the decline of the Ngizim?
- v. Has World Ngizim Day (11 November) and the restoration of the emirate in 2000 helped to preserve Ngizim cultural identity?

Research Objectives

- i. To trace the origin of the Ngizim from Kanem-Borno.
- ii. To examine the founding of Potiskum (Pataskum) by Mai Bauya in 1808/1809.
- iii. To analyse the 1913 merger of Potiskum into Fika and its effects.
- iv. To investigate the resistance led by Mai Agudum.
- v. To assess the modern preservation of Ngizim identity through World Ngizim Day (11 November) and the restoration of the emirate in 2000.

Literature Review

This section reviews the literature on four concepts: ethnicity, oral tradition, cultural identity and cultural change, and the traditional political system. It ends with a review of related literature and the research gap.

Concept of Ethnicity

Ethnicity is defined as a shared identity based on common language, ancestry and culture (Barth, 1969). It is also defined as a group identity based on common culture, language, a myth of common ancestry, territory and a shared consciousness of being different from others. Weber (1978) defined an ethnic group as “those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both.”

An ethnic group exists when people both see themselves as different and are seen by others as different.

1 Major schools of thought and their authors

1. Primordialism - Clifford Geertz (1973), Edward Shils Idea: Ethnicity is natural, given at birth, in blood and kinship. You are born into it and you cannot change it.

2. Constructivism - Fredrik Barth (1969), Benedict Anderson (1991) Idea: Ethnicity is socially constructed. It is not what is inside the group, but the boundary you create between "us" and "them". Barth said boundaries are maintained through interaction. Anderson said ethnic groups are "Imagined Communities"

3. Instrumentalism - Paul Brass (1991), Abner Cohen, Anthony Smith Idea: Ethnicity is a political tool. Elites use it to compete for power, jobs, and resources. It is not ancient hatred, it is modern interest.

Strength and weakness of ethnicity

Strengths:

Identity and Belonging: Gives psychological security, name, and language. A Ngizim man knows who he is.

2. Social Cohesion: Creates unity, mutual help, and cultural preservation - festival like baba day of Ngizim or Day 11-11 festival in Potiskum.

3. Political Mobilization: Minority groups can mobilize to demand rights, emirate, and representation.

4. Cultural Preservation: Language (Ngizim is a Chadic language), dress, history preserved.

Weaknesses:

1. Ethnic Conflict and Tribalism: Leads to competition over jobs and power - as seen in Yobe where Ngizim, Bolewa, Kare-Kare, Kanuri struggle for positions.

2. Exclusion and Stereotyping: "We vs Them" creates discrimination against outsiders.

3. Instrumentalization by Elites: Leaders use ethnicity to win elections even if candidate is incompetent.

4. Language Endangerment: When dominant ethnicity (Hausa Fulani/Bolewa dominates, minority language like Ngizim, Gamo, kare kare dies among youth.

Relationship with story of Ngizim people of Potiskum

The Ngizim story perfectly shows all 3 School of thought influence in paper:

1. Primordial View of Ngizim:

Ngizim are the original founders of Potiskum Emirate in 1809 by Mai Bauya. They have myth of common origin, their own language Ngizim, and reputation as formidable warriors since Bornu Empire in 1472. They are estimated 100,000 in 1993, living primarily in Potiskum and areas east and south. (Yusuf, 2013). This is Geertz's blood and culture argument.

2. Constructivist View:

Ngizim identity was reshaped by colonialism. In 1913, British merged Potiskum Emirate into Fika Emirate (Bolewa) for administrative convenience. Overnight Ngizim became minority under Bolewa rule. The boundary of "Who owns Potiskum" was socially constructed by the British District Officer. The Ngizim had to fight to re-establish their identity, which only succeeded in 2000 when Potiskum became independent emirate again, and in 1993 when Mai Muhammadu Atiyaye was appointed. This is Barth's boundary theory.

3. Instrumentalist View:

Today, Ngizim Day celebration hosted by Emir Umaru Bubaram Ibn Wuriwa Bauya is used to reconnect history, preserve tradition and foster unity and also to demand political recognition in Yobe. Elites use Ngizim ethnicity to compete for governorship and LGA chairmanship in Yobe South - as analysts note, tribalism is used to win elections in Yobe.

Without ethnicity, Ngizim would have disappeared after being assimilated in Borno and Jigawa. With ethnicity, they kept their struggle and got their emirate back as first-class emir. But the same ethnicity also creates tension with Kare-Kare and Bolewa over who truly owns Potiskum, which started from a dispute over a well in a "Kuma" forest.

2 Concept of Oral Tradition

Vansina (1985) defines oral tradition as oral testimony transmitted across generations. For societies with limited written records, like the Ngizim, oral tradition remains the major source for reconstructing the origin of Potiskum, the genealogies of the Mais and the meaning of cultural festivals. It has also helped to keep the cultural heritage of the Ngizim alive through traditional political and cultural forms, such as names, food and the titles of office holders, which bear traditional names (Muhammad-Gombe & Yusuf, 2019). However, Vansina (1985) also stresses the weaknesses of oral tradition: over a long period, accounts may be distorted, shaped by the political interests of the narrator, or confused over dates, and unlike written documents they lack a fixed text. This is a particular concern here, because many informants are palace officials and elders who may favour the Mai's version of events. To reduce this risk, this study compared the accounts of palace officials with those of elders, local historians and Ngizim association leaders, and checked them against archival and published sources (see Section 3.0).

3 Concept of Cultural Identity and Cultural Change

Cultural identity refers to the traits that distinguish a group, while cultural change is the alteration of those traits through external contact (Otiye, 1990). Ngizim identity is expressed in language and in festivals such as the Baba festival, a traditional annual festival held to celebrate the new harvest, with a display of farm produce and the participation of all the chieftaincy titles; it is now held on 11 November every year (Muhammad, 2000). The festival continues to be observed as World Ngizim Day in Potiskum, to commemorate Ngizim cultural heritage and the socio-political and economic life of the people. Change is evident in the adoption of Islam, the use of Hausa in markets, and the decline of the Ngizim language among the youth; Muhammad-Gombe and Yusuf (2019) discuss the threat that Hausa poses to Ngizim as an endangered language. Because Hausa is spoken within and outside Ngizim communities, it has contributed to the decline of the language.

4 Concept of Traditional Political System

Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) describe traditional political systems as the indigenous institutions through which governance, law and authority are organised in a society. Among the Ngizim, the system revolves around the Mai Potiskum as land custodian, supported by a council of title holders. Since the restoration of the stool in 1993 and its upgrade to first class in 2000 (see Section 4.4), the Mai Potiskum has headed a separate emirate, although the Emir of Fika is reported to chair the Yobe State Council of Traditional Rulers while residing in Potiskum rather than in Fika, his ancestral home. In the modern local government system, the traditional system remains relevant for customary administration.

5 Review of Related Literature and Research Gap

Brenner (1973) and the Gazetteers of the Northern Provinces (1920, p. 124) state that Potiskum was a Ngizim village before the jihad, and Hogben and Kirk-Greene (1966) trace its

founding to Mai Jalo and Bauya. Abubakar (2013) provides the most comprehensive local account, from the Pataskum Emirate Council, while Yusuf (2013) treats Potiskum within the history of Fika Emirate. On theory, this paper draws on Barth (1969) on ethnic boundaries, Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) on traditional political systems, Vansina (1985) on oral tradition and Otite (1990) on cultural change. The existing literature is consistent in its account of the political, cultural and economic antecedents of the Ngizim; however, it is scattered, often treated as a sub-section of broader studies on Fika Emirate, Borno or Hausa-Fulani history, and says little about the new political and economic order. The gap addressed by this study is that no earlier work presents focused field evidence, from oral and archival sources, that places the Ngizim at the centre of the history of Potiskum.

Based on available works, the key gaps are as follows:

- i. **Theoretical gaps, Oral History and Indigenous Sources**, most written accounts rely on colonial records and Hausa/Arabic chronicles. Very little has been properly documented from Ngizim oral traditions, proverbs, songs, and genealogies of Mai Potiskum. This leads to a Hausa-centric narrative where Ngizim contributions are minimized. The pre-Jihadi political structure of Ngizim is poorly understood.
- ii. **Practical gaps, Pre-Colonial Political Autonomy of Ngizim**, the exact nature of the relationship between the Mai Potiskum and the Emir of Fika before 1809 and between 1809-1903 is unclear. Was Potiskum a fully subjugated district, or a semi-autonomous Ngizim kingdom paying tribute? Most texts just say "under Fika" without detail.
- iii. **Economic History beyond Cattle Market**, literature focuses heavily on Potiskum as a cattle market. There is little on Early Ngizim farming systems, fishing, and trade routes before the 20th century, the role of Ngizim women in Potiskum's economy. How the Ngizim language and culture shaped the market's commercial terms and networks. Potiskum's identity is reduced to "cattle town" instead of a multi-layered Ngizim settlement.
- iv. **Cultural and Religious Transformation gaps**, there is limited academic work on how Islamization and later Sufi orders interacted with Ngizim traditional religion. We lack studies on syncretism, the fate of Ngizim priests, shrines, and festivals like "Baba" after Islam became dominant. Language and Ethno linguistics, the Ngizim language is endangered but has very few grammars, dictionaries, or studies on its dialects within Potiskum LGA, Nangere and Fune LGA. Without documentation, aspects of Ngizim worldview encoded in language will be lost. Most linguists group it under Biu-Mandara with little fieldwork in Potiskum itself.
- v. **Impact of Modern Crises**. There is almost no recent scholarly work on how Boko Haram insurgency 2009-2016, climate change, and urbanization specifically affected Ngizim communities, land ownership, and cultural practices in Potiskum. The literature stops around 1990s. The last 25 years have changed Potiskum's demography significantly.
- vi. **Biographies and Leadership**, no comprehensive list or biography of Mai Potiskums with dates, reigns, and achievements. Most names are only mentioned in passing in Fika Emirate histories. It makes it hard to build a proper Ngizim timeline independent of Fika.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative ethno-historical design. Primary data were obtained through in-depth interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The study area is Potiskum Local Government Area. Twelve informants were purposively selected: three palace officials, four elders aged 68–82, three local historians and two Ngizim Association leaders. Interviews were conducted between 15 January and 20 March 2024 in the Kara, Bolewa and Jigawa wards

and at the Mai Potiskum Palace. Archival data were drawn from NAK SNP 17/8/406 (Fika Division Annual Reports, National Archives, Kaduna). Responses were analysed through thematic coding. Consistent with qualitative research principles, sample size was determined by data saturation rather than by a statistical formula. The participants were purposively selected across the categories of respondents. This follows Morse (2000), who notes that 10–30 interviews are adequate for phenomenological studies. Saturation is expected within this range because the study focuses on a specific phenomenon. Secondary data were obtained from books on Fika Emirate, Yobe historical journals and archival records, including a brief visit to the Pataskum Emirate museum. The data were analysed thematically, with responses coded into themes such as origin, political structure, economy and identity.

Findings and Discussion

1 Origin and Settlement

The name Potiskum is a corrupted form of Pataskum, the name given to the settlement by its founder, Bauya. It combines the Ngizim words pata (“forest”) and skum (the name of a local tree) (Abubakar, 2013), which is consistent with the testimony of Alhaji Audu Mai-Borno quoted below.

Ngizim people belong to the Afro-Asiatic family, West Chadic B (Schuh, 1978). They are part of peoples who inhabited Borno and west of Lake Chad from time immemorial (Gazetteers, Vol. 11). Oral tradition: Ali Ngizimami led migration after Kanem civil wars 1396-1472. Oral Quotation: *Alhaji Audu Mai-Borno, 72 years, Palace Historian, interviewed 18/01/2024: "Bauya ne ya kafa Pataskum bayan ya kori Karakare a 1809. Pata maana daji, Skum maana itaciya mai tsami.* The Ngizim people (Ngizmawa, Ngezzim) lives mostly in Yobe state, north eastern Nigeria. Ngizim people are the dominant people who live in the area to the east and south of Potiskum (the largest city in Yobe state) as well in Potiskum town, which was originally an Ngizim town. Ngizim populations once inhabited parts of old Bornu and settled in places like Ngazargamu, Njimi, Kukawa, Fune, Potiskum, Bursari, Dapchi, Kayari, Ngojin, Zigawu, Damagun, Alaraba, Dawura, Gashua, e.t.c they also settled in the old kano states in places like Hadejia, Riruwai e.t.c but some of them have lost their cultural identity after being assimilated into other ethnic groups. Abubakar, M. D. (2013).

The Ngizim people speak a Chadic language also called Ngizim, they are part of a larger group of tribes called the Kanuri. The Kanuri are the dominant group in the region, like all the Kanuri people, the Ngizim people are tall and dark skinned. Most of the Ngizim people are farmers; they grow millet as their main crop, and grow corn, sorghum and peanuts. They raise sheep, goats and some horses. Horses are a symbol of importance and prestige to Ngizim people. They look stately and dignified and are proud of their past and present leadership in governing Yobe State, Muslim Sultanate of Yola and kanem-Bornu Empire as well. The most important physical feature that distinguished an Ngizim man from other tribes is his tribal marks. This was prior to the 1924s when the British crusaders created a lot of bad impressions about it, which leads to the discouragement of tribal marks, from 1950s onward, a good number of Ngizim people preferred to remain without their tribal marks. However, some still have the tribal marks, but with much modifications from the ancient traditional marks. The usual pattern was to have the marks drawn from the forehead across their face. Abubakar, M. D. (2013).

The word Ngizim have been corrupted in so many texts, instances of this by various historians and anthropologists include addressing Ngizim people as Nguzum, Ngwazim, N'gazim, Ngojin, Ngazar, Nkazara, Guzumawa and even Nguidjim, among others. Whatever they called, Ngizim are industrious people, who believe in justice and fair-play. They would not

go out scheming to cheat, and are quick to rise against any plot to outsmart them. That is why they are regarded as veteran warriors by the then colonialist.

There is a branch of Ngizim in Chad republic called Nguidjim, who uses local board as their symbol of authority. They use the local board because they are Islamic propagators who migrated to Africa from Yemen. They have two first class emirs in Chad republic and are situated in Sudan boarder, central Chad and Cameroon boarder.

However, the Ngizim people traces there origin to Asia (Bagdad), there is also a close historical relationship between them and the Teshinawa of Gugai, katagum region. The Teshinawa are in turn related to the Gazara both of which related to the Ngizim because they speak similar language to that of Ngizim. In another tradition, the *Ngizim, Bade, Teshinawa* and the *Gazara* are referred to as the “**Badu**” (herdsmen) by the Kanuri, having inter-married with the *kyari or Amakitau*; they formed the bulk of the *Bulala-Ngazar* in Borno. Abubakar, M. D. (2013).

2 Social Organisation and Culture

Ngizim villages are different sizes; most villages contain walled-in compounds surrounding several mud or grass houses with thatched, cone-shaped roofs. This type of house is very cool during the hot season. Farmlands surround each settlement. The household, not the family itself, is the important unit in Ngizim life.

The head man of a household gains importance by the number of Ngizim who live in his household. Sometimes young men are loaned to households to help with field labor and to help defend the family. In return, the head of the household gives that young man clothing, feeds him, pays his bride price and perhaps provides a bride for him. Ngizim men marry when they are in their early twenties and a man may have as many as four wives. For festivals and ceremonies the Ngizim men wear large robe-type garments worn with turbans or brightly woven caps. The loose fitting robes keep the men cool in the heat. Ngizim men are wonderful drummers, their festivals and ceremonies usually feature drumming and dancing. Majority of Ngizim people follow the beliefs of Islam. The Muslim holy book (the holy Qur'an) teaches peace, tolerance, justice, unity and that man is important and has supreme authority in his household.

Oral tradition also holds that their migration from Birnin-Badr, southwest of Mecca, due to conflict (Abubakar, 2013). The route passed through Asben → Belma → Kanem → Komadugu Yobe. By 1259 A.D. they were in Fittir, Kanem-Borno (Palmer, 1936). The Kayi-Ngizim amalgamation c. 1350 contributed to the Bulala/Gaoga polity. A.H.M. Kirk-Greene (1966) in The Emirates of Northern Nigeria synthesized oral traditions on Potiskum's founding by Mai Jalo and Bauya. Abubakar (2013) provides the most comprehensive local manuscript from the Pataskum Emirate Council. Linguists like Schuh (1978) classify Ngizim as West Chadic B. Recent work by Muhammad-Gombe & Yusuf (2019) addresses language endangerment. Ngizim People and their Culture by Abubakar Musa Danchuwa

3 Political Structure, the 1913 Merger and Resistance

According to archival records, NAK SNP 17/8/406 (1913) states: “Potiskum is an Ngizim settlement originally under Mai Bauya.” The study found that the Ngizim established Potiskum as a farming settlement in the 16th–17th century (Schuh, 1978). The political system was independent until it was incorporated into Fika Emirate after the 1809 jihad. Published evidence supports this: the Gazetteers (1920, p. 124) confirm the Ngizim as aboriginals. In 1913 the British, for administrative convenience, merged Potiskum into Fika. The Ngizim resisted through Mai Agudum, who refused to pay tribute and mobilised warriors, and was arrested and executed in the 1920s. Malam Mamman Potiskum, aged 80, interviewed on 22 February 2024, said:

“Agudum bai yarda da mulkin Fika ba, shi yasa aka kashe shi, amma sunan sa ya dade.” (Agudum did not accept Fika rule, which is why he was killed, but his name has lived on). The stool survived as a District Head until its restoration in 1993 with the appointment of Mai Atiyaye.

4 Economy, Religion and Identity

Economically, Potiskum's transformation under British rule into a cattle market attracted Hausa, Fulani, Ngamo and other groups, making Hausa the lingua franca and causing a gradual shift away from the Ngizim language (Hausaization). British colonial rule also subordinated the Mai Potiskum under Fika. Religiously, Islam replaced the Gurunda cult and other traditional religion, although elements of traditional festivals persist and World Ngizim Day (11 November) is preserved as a cultural festival. The 1993 appointment of Mai Muhammadu Atiyaye, and the upgrading of Mai Umaru Bubaram Ibn Wuriwa Bauya to first class in 2000, were viewed as the ultimate form of resistance. The institution of Mai Potiskum still symbolizes Ngizim identity.

5 Discussion in Relation to Earlier Studies

These findings can be set against earlier writers. The view that Potiskum was a Ngizim settlement before the jihad agrees with the Gazetteers (1920) and Brenner (1973), and the account of its founding by Mai Jalo and Bauya agrees with Hogben and Kirk-Greene (1966) and Abubakar (2013). By contrast, Yusuf (2013) treats Potiskum within the history of Fika Emirate, and the 1913 merger and the execution of Mai Agudum show how that subordination was imposed under colonial administration. The persistence of the Mai Potiskum institution and of World Ngizim Day, alongside the shift from Ngizim to Hausa, is consistent with Barth's (1969) view that ethnic boundaries are maintained through interaction rather than through unchanged cultural content. The dating of the founding to the 16th–17th century rests on limited evidence and should be treated as provisional.

Conclusion

The history of the Ngizim of Potiskum shows both continuity and change. After Bauya, all but one of the rulers of Pataskum (Mai Muhammad Atiyaye) were his direct descendants, and this line was not interrupted by the imposition of colonial rule or by the reduction of the Mai to a village head. The restoration of the emirate in 1993 and its upgrade to first class in 2000 followed a long struggle by the Ngizim for recognition.

The findings show that Ngizim identity has persisted mainly through the institution of Mai Potiskum, the line of its rulers and the annual World Ngizim Day. It has changed in language, religion and the economy: Islamization, Hausaization and the growth of Potiskum as a cosmopolitan commercial centre have encouraged a shift from Ngizim to Hausa, especially among the youth. The Ngizim thus moved from migrants in Kanem to settlers and rulers of Potiskum, subjects of Bornu, a subordinated group under colonial Fika, and a restored emirate in modern Nigeria. The major challenge to Ngizim identity is cultural and social change arising from modernization and the neglect of oral history.

Recommendations

1. The Yobe State Government should establish a Ngizim History Museum in Potiskum to preserve the historical evidence of the culture and heritage of the people for future generations, in view of the limited documentation of Ngizim history found in this study.
2. Universities and the Potiskum Emirate Council should document Ngizim oral traditions and the Ngizim language, because oral tradition is the major source of Ngizim history (Section 2.2) and is at risk of being lost. This will also help researchers who wish to study the Ngizim and Potiskum.

3. The State Universal Basic Education Board and the Local Education Authority should include the Ngizim language in the curricula of primary and secondary schools in Potiskum, as is done for Hausa, in view of the decline of Ngizim among the youth (Section 4.4).

4. The Yobe State Government should give greater recognition to the Mai Potiskum in governance and cultural policy, in view of the continuity of the institution and its role as a symbol of Ngizim identity (Section 4.4).

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