

## Research Article

# An Evaluation of the Role of Women in Political and Socio-Economic Activities in Kanem Borno History

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**Abstract:** This research study clearly outlined the role of women in the political and socio-economic activities in Kanem Borno history. The Sayfawa dynasty of Kanem Borno is believed to have been one of the largest ruling dynasty in the world. The origin of the dynasty is closely tied to the tradition of origin attributing to the foundation of the kingdom of Kanem Borno to Sayf B. Dhiyazan of Himyar. The study dwelled in the reign of Mai Humi Jilmi, Mai Dunama, Mai Ali Ghaji and Idris Aloomu under whose reigns the installation of title holder and position of women in the Kanem Borno history took place. Source for this research study were obtained mostly from secondary and archival material which made it more comprehensive and conceptualized. The study discuss the various activities of women in both political and socio-economic aspects in Kanem Borno history during the syfawa dynastic as a result of that development the position of women toward the socio-economic activities in Kanem Borno upliftment was recognize.

**Keywords:** role of women, activities, political, economic

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## Introduction

### Historical Background of Kanem Borno Empire

The Kanem Empire existed in modern Chad and Libya. It was known to the Arabian geographers as the Kanem-Borno Empire from the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD onward and lasted, in some form, until 1893. The history of the empire from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward is mainly known from the Royal chronicle or Girgam discovered in 1851 by the German traveler Heinrich Barth. The Kanem Empire originated at an unknown period to the northeast of Lake Chad. It was located at the southern end of the Trans-Saharan trade route between Tripoli and the region of Lake Chad. Besides its urban elite, it included a confederation of nomadic peoples who spoke languages of the Teda-Daza (Toubou) group. One theory based on early Arabic sources suggests that the dominance of the Zaghawa people bound the confederation together.

The Sayfawa dynasty of Kanem-Borno is believed to have been one of the longest ruling dynasty in the world. It is generally claimed that the dynasty lasted for the best part of one million during which period the Sayfawa Mais hold sway over the greater part of the Lake Chad Basin region. The origin of the dynasty is closely tied to the tradition of origin attributing the foundation of the kingdom of Kanem-Borno to Sayf B. Dhiyazan of Himyar. This claim of origin from Sayf B. Dhiyazan was only one among other factors that

accounted for the emergence and longevity of Maghumi to the forefront of commercial and political life in Kanem Borno towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the beginning of 10<sup>th</sup> century, was the liberal attitude of the Maghumi in relation to other sub groups of the Kanembu like the Zaghawa, Bulala, and the Tubu, the military superiority of the Maghumi which also accounted for the rise of very powerful and energetic rulers amongst them.

The Sayfawa rulers played an important role in the propagation of the Islamic faith in the region of Kanem-Borno. It is not out of context to indeed attribute the gradual but steady expansion of the state of Kanem Borno under the Sayfawa to the pursuance of a policy of Islamization. The declaration of Islam as a state religion also transformed the state in a number of ways and affected the structure of the state in all its ramifications. The most important people living around the Lake Chad, the heart of the kingdom of Borno are the Kanuris. The history of Borno had been greatly influenced by the shallow waters of Lake Chad. This enormous sheet of water in spite of its swampy banks has been a special attraction to the nomad dwellers of the Southern Sahara. The geographical position of Kanem-Borno is thus the key to its history. From early times nomadic tribes from the desert had converged on the Lake Chad basin. At first they were contented to drive their beast to the fertile region for a short period,

finally retiring to their desert abodes. However, the attraction offered by the congenial conditions of the Lake Chad basin offered irresistible invitation to them for permanent occupation.

The Lake Chad region had a number of links with the outside world. From early times an important caravan routes linked it with Tripoli in the North Africa through Murzuk in the Fezzan and through Bilma in Southern Sahara. The first Sayfawa capital was Njimi in Kanem east of Lake Chad. The Sayfawa kings were known by the title Mai. The first Muslim king of Kanem-Borno was Mai Hume Jilme C. 1085-1097, the tenth ruler of Sayfawa dynasty. It is thought that Islam was introduced into Kanem Borno from North Africa. The successor of Mai Hume Jilmi enthusiastically embraced the Islamic faith and pilgrimage to Mecca became an important feature of Borno royalty. Quranic law and Muslim system of administration spread in the kingdom. Islamic learning and culture became firmly established in Borno.

Al-Idris a well known Arabic scholar wrote about Kanem-Borno after the introduction of Islam, he said so much about the kingdom of Kanem-Borno that. "It became clear that within a century after the acceptance of Islam, Borno had come into the orbit of the Arab world". After making the pilgrimage to Mecca, Mai Hume jilmi and his successors surrounded themselves with Islamic scholars. Borno which controlled the trade route eastward to Darfur, also probably responsible for the introduction of Islam into the kingdom during the fifteen century. Hume Jilmi was succeeded as by Mai Dunoma I C. (1097 – 1150). Dunoma I is said to have made pilgrimage three times to mecca, on each occasion accompanied by a large body of followers. It appears that he was in the end drowned by Egyptains at Suez because it is suspected, that they were jealous of his growing power and influence in the Middle East.

During the succeeding reigns of Mai Biri, C. (1151 – 1176) and Selma C (1194-1220) friendly relation were established and Maintained between Kanem Borno and Tunisia on the North African coast. During the reign of Mai Dunoma 111C – (1220 – 1559) who was a war like and restless prince, Borno embassy continued to be Maintained in Tunisia. From the middle of the thirteenth century, to the end of fourteenth century, there was a bitter struggle between the Kanuri and the so, the group of aboriginal tribes. The so displayed great courage and ferocity, for it is said that they were able to kill four Kanuri kings in succession. During the reign of Mai Daud C- (1366 – 1376), the affairs of Kanem became complicated by the outbreak of civil war in the royal family. In the end Mai Daud was driven out of Njimi, his capital and was finally killed by Bulala Mai Umar Ibn Idris (1384 – 1388).

In the west, the Sayfawa dynasty was able to eventually re-establish itself firmly in the rich province of Borno

proper at Ngazargamu under Mai Ali Gaji (1472 – 1504); at Ngazargamu the second Kanuri Empire began. The new capital Ngazargamu lay on the present Northeast border between the federal republic of Nigeria and the Niger republic. Ngazargamu reMained the capital of Borno until its capture and destruction by the Fulani in 1812. Mai Ali Gaji put an end to the civil war which had so weakened his kingdom and began to reform its administration. He put new enthusiasm into practice of the Muslim faith by his own devoted example; he raised a large army for internal security. Having put his own house in order, Ali Gaji began to wage war on neighboring territories.

Ali Gaji applied his energy so much to fighting that he acquired the title El-Ghazali, meaning the warrior. He finally subjugated the Bulala. During Ali Gaji's reign Borno became important in the Trans-Saharan trade. Borno exchange slave for horses from North Africa. During the fifteen century, Borno has really achieved international recognition, for it found a place on world map prepared by the Portuguese towards the end of the century. Ali Gaji was succeeded by a worthy ruler in the person of Mai Idris Katagarmabe by C (1504 – 1526). Idris completed the subjugation of the Bulala and his successive campaigns against them brought him back to the old capital Njimi.

Mai Idris Katakarmabe took the trouble to establish diplomatic relation with North Africa and in 1512 he sent an ambassador to Tripoli. The greatest name in the history of Borno during the second Kanuri Empire is that of Mai Idris Alauma C (1580 – 1617). Idris Alauma was able to devote himself to peaceful pursuit, probably in the ninth year of his reign he under took the pilgrimage to Mecca where he built a hostel for the comfort of Borno pilgrimages. At home he tried to enforce Muslim law at expense of local customary practice.

Mai Idris Alauma, improved Ngazargamu by the construction of bricks building to replace the old red ones. No doubt the second Borno Empire reached its peak under Mai Idris Alauma who according to the Borno chronicles promoted the prosperity of the country and the wealth of the town. The great German scholar and traveller Barth paid tribute to Mai Idris Alauma in the following words. "All together Mai Idris appears to have been an excellent prince, uniting in himself the most qualities, war like energy combined with mildness and intelligence, courage with patience, severity with pious feelings.

#### **Position of Women in Kanem Borno History**

If we take a closer look at women in powerful positions, women as regent queens were rare in African monarchies; women reigned for an immature king to be, who was too young to be given the power of rulership, but the office of the regent in pre-colonial African societies we shall observed that it is mostly senior

women who served important roles such as queen mothers, king sister, or royal wives. (Equally we shall notice that although women had powerful positions, women as regent queens were rare in African monarchies. Women might have reigned for an immature king to be who was too young to be given the power of rulership, but the office of the regent was hardly handed over to a woman). Most African oral traditions, surviving religious cults and extant political institutions still attest to the significant position which women occupied in the social, economic and political evolution of different African communities. Such evidence also shows conclusively that theirs not merely a passive and supportive role, but was also dynamic and constructive.

Many women have made their mark in the history of Nigerian people in different societies. They lived in various periods, which are comparatively fairly well documented, others are virtually legendary characters that existed in the recesses of Nigerian history. Example of this category of women includes Inkpi of the Igala, Moreni of the Yoruba and Daura of the Hausa. In the Hausa states for instance, women appear to have been early political rulers. The rulers of Daura prior to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, according to traditions, were women bearing the title Magajiya (Queen).

Women in the Juken political system were also not left behind. They are known to have played a great role in the administration of the kingdom. For example the Ahgwu Isi, was one of the leading female title holders, and counterpart of the sovereign. Her office was for life, that is to say until she died. The Ahgwu Isi lived outside the Aku palace in her own residence with a court and some officials. Part of her priestly function was to plant the royal annual seeds and she was seen as the link between the potentially fragmented parts of Jukun polity.

The survival of terms like *Uwarsoro* (Maryam, first wife of Emir) *Jakadiyakuyanga* (over seer of slave women) and *Saxaka* in places like Kano, Katagum, Sokoto, Bauchi, Katsina and so on, are clear indications of the social, economic and political roles played by women in the regions during the pre-colonial period.

Women in Kanem Borno history participated in the administration of the state and had contributed greatly to its economic development of the people. They were the guiding posts that dictated the phase of development of Borno. The culture which offered them opportunity in which they contributed greatly was Islamic culture and their contribution is viewed, assessed and evaluated in Islamic perspective. From about the eleventh century onwards, contacts with Islam are known for the region. These were established mainly through the great trade routes that linked the Lake Chad area with North Africa. Since the foundation of a new residence of the Sayfawa in 1472 in Birni Gazargamu, the spread of Islam is

furthermore mirrored in Borno scholarship, which was famous outside the polity. Islamisation process in particular has a lasting impact especially on the position of women.

The women have always played a crucial role in the establishment and consolidation of the Sayfawa dynasty that lasted for one thousand years during which period the Sayfawa Mais held sway over the greater part of the Lake Chad Basin region. At the very early stage of the Sayfawa Dynasty, the Mais realized the importance of integrating the various tribal groups in the empire to forestall major political rivalry as well as winning and gaining their loyalty. To do this the Mais initiated the policy of inter-marriage there by making every tribal group have a stake in the government.

Women were the major catalyst of the integration. They are the different groups made to marry men from other tribal groups in order to maintain and strengthen the cordial relationship existing in the dynasty. These traditions of inter-marriage perhaps explain Henrich Barth's observation at the time of his visit in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Kings always bore the name of their mother, and that the name of the mothers' tribes is almost continually added in the chronicle as a circumstance of the greatest importance. The famous king Dunoma Ibn Salma is known in Borno generally only under the name of Dibalami, from the name of his mother, Dibali. And the full form of his royal title is the Dibalami Dunoma salmami, his mother name, as the most noble and important, presiding his individual name, which is followed by the name derived from his father.

#### **Foundation of Borno and Political Role of Women**

A study of the foundation of the empire is necessary because the political role of women starts from the beginning of the empire. That is to say it began through the first and second empire as well as in the Sayfawa and the Shehu Dynasty.

The foundation of the Borno Empire was laid towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> C under the powerful influence of Mai Ali Gaji (1470-1503). Ali initially settled on the North-Western shores of Lake Chad possibly building the brick place-cum-futrees complex of Garumele which controlled the northern route to Borno. At Ladi, nearby he was attacked by the Bulala. Not long after this he moved his capital up the valley of the Kumadugu Yobe to a site near the confluence of the Yobe with the Kumadugu Gona. Legends relate how he obtained the land from the 'So' by trickery perhaps an indication that the Kanembu were not yet powerful enough to seize it outright the associated legend of the torture of the henna might be interpreted as a memory of the seizure of large numbers of local women by the newcomers.

The significance of the foundation of Birni Gazargamu cannot be overemphasized. Its importance was

recognized by the Kanuri as shown by the saying: Ali..... who built the city. The correlation between walled towns and military power and security is shown in another praise song “Mai Ali ..... he of the tall-walled towns an long spears”. The provision of a secure base enables Ali to concentrate on establishing his authority throughout Borno and his successors to direct the expansion into the neighboring lands. At least an important fact was that Birni Gazargamu was well placed to become a major entrepot of Sahara and Sudanic trade.

Initially the area directly administered from the Birni seems to have been small, although a considerable part of the surrounding region appears to have acknowledged some form of relationship. The exact nature of this relationship is not yet clear. We know of campaigns waged over considerable distances, while at the same time hostile communities existed within thirty miles of the capital. The answer might lie in the foregoing reference to “tall-walled towns’ fortified settlement from which the surrounding areas were controlled-areas which were also watched by the still considerable numbers of pastoral Kanuri. It is significant that Alis wars were defensive. The defeat of the Bulala was not followed up, no was his victory over the Kona who invaded Borno some years later. The only other military activities were primarily police actions against recalcitrant tributaries such as Lagone.

Ali’s military ability ensured security at home. Expansion did not occur but only towards Borno’s natural frontiers. The moderation is reflected in his work and an administrator. He relied upon Islamic advisors. Men such as ‘Abdal-Qawwata and later ‘Umar b. Uthman. Umar, who became wazir aided ‘Ali in his attempt to rule according to the sharia to reduce abuses and to curtail the activities of over powerful office-holders. Ali died in 1503 he left a state, still small, but secure with great potential. The foundation was well laid and his successors built on them.

The Zaghawa, a nomadic group established a centralized political system in Kanem in the 9<sup>th</sup> century with affective administrative structure. This was because of the emergence of various tribal groups and clans which gradually developed into semi-autonomous entities distinct from the main Sayfawa ruling dynasty. Not much is known about the nature of their political system structurally and functionally, it is however clear that they established a centralized political system and Maintained commercial links with some of their neighbors. Evidence shows that the Zaghawa court at Manan had some divine attributes and their ruler lived in absolute seclusion. Kanem reached the peak of its power by the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century under Mai Donuma Dibalami. But thereafter it entered a phase of dynastic crisis which continued up to the second half of 14<sup>th</sup> century. It was as a result of this crisis that the Sayfawa were at last forced to migrate to the area west of Lake

Chad and founded their new permanent capital at Birni Gazargamu where an organized system was established under powerful rulers for a more stable government. The main units in the administrative structure of Borno were the royal family which was the nucleus of the whole political system, the council which was the decision making body of the state. The Kogunawa is the body of nobility who served as the executives and carried out the immense work of the state, and the military. The composition of which included member from each of the above units.

Since the time of the first dynasties residing in Borno from about (1068) in Kanem, 1472 in Borno written sources mentioned female titles and office. According to available sources all female office holders were related to the ruler. The king’s mother, his senior wife and one sister held the most influential positions. Almost all the authors mention the title for the Queen mother, Magira (Maira) and senior wife, Ghumsa (Gumsu), whereas the title for the sister Mogoram (mouworam) or daughter Mairam is noted by some only.

The Magira in her capacity as queen mother wielded tremendous power and earned, derived much respect and allegiance to the Mais followers. She rose to influential position during the reign of Mai Biri Ibn Dunama C. 1163 – 1190. During this period, a political crisis occurred in Kanem which has to do with the strict application of the sharia as the law of the land. Mai Biri ordered the execution of a thief, his action was not in conformity with the Islamic law, which was gradually taking its position in the state. As a result of this, the Magira, Fusam Sakarami intervened and deposes the Mai Biri for detention and confinement for miscarriage of justice, and imprisonment for one year.

The Magira Fusam, daughter of Sakarami of a caste of Kayi was quoted as saying “how is it that you have killed the thief in view of the command of God, hands of the thief must be cut off, male or female, this development goes to show the growing influence of Islam in state”. The exercise of authority by the Magira over the conduct of Mai in public affairs also seems to suggest that the royal family was established on a system of checks and balance.

The dynamic history of the Sayfawa in the mid 6<sup>th</sup> century is confusing. Oral traditions relate how the Magira the senior royal female, Aisha kili bint Dunama acted as regent for the young Idris b. Ali having earlier saved him from threats to his life by both her father and her brother, Abdullahi, Idris, the post humous son of his father must have been at least seventeen years old at the death of Dunama and in his twenties on the death of Abdullahi-hardly young enough to need a regent. Aisha might have saved his life. He seems to have spent some years with her maternal kin, the Bulala. Both the Diwan and Girgam (Kanuri chronicles) record the reign



of Abdullahi as the successor of Dunama. The Girgam also stated that Maira Aisa Keli Ngermaram also held power at the time of Abdullahi's reign.

Magira Aisa had played a very important role in the political life of the state in the 1560s. She was known as the owner of the white stallion. Magira Aisa Ngermaram intervened in the state administration to control a dynastic crisis which might lead to the total collapse of the kingdom. The length of her reign had exactly not been established, except with widespread tradition that she had reigned for seven years. Tradition considers her as one of the most powerful rulers of Borno who led successful military expeditions. Her name is inserted in the list of her rulers of the state. Tradition said that when the Magira was fully dressed up, mounted on her white stallion and appeared in the battle, military officers used to argue as to whether she was a man or woman.

The role the queen mother played in the military management and control of state affairs were very crucial to the very survival of the dynasty and the kingdom of Kanem-Borno. If not for her intervention, the history of Kanem-Borno could no doubt have taken a different dimension and the dynasty itself would perhaps have decline and collapsed earlier than 1808. During her reign Magira Aisa killi Ngermaram was reported in the Girgam to have rebuilt the palace and the central mosques with red bricks. She restored peace and stability when the state was threatened by internal and royal crisis.

She was also responsible for settling the long dispute between the two disputing factions of the sons of Ibrahim Ibn Nikale (i.e Daudites and Idrissites) supporters of Daud Ibn Ibrahim Nikale and Idriss ibn Ibrahim Nikale who in a bid to succeed their late father in a serious dynastic feud. This succession dispute nearly brought the empire to an end. She also saw to the affairs of women under her. She was the judge of the wives and concubines of the Mai. All the newly concubines were first brought to her for inspection to determine whether they are healthy or not. The Queen mother was also considered the grandmother of all the Kongunawa. She must be informed of the granting of all titles, and the newly invested title holder must visit her after receiving his office from the Mai. When the kongunawa came to the town they visited her and sent them gifts of food and clothing.

The Queen mother administered the largest fiefs at the time of Shehu Hashimi (1893). From this income, she could finance her household and establish client relationship (with the courtiers at least). The Magira had forty-eight villages scattered over twelve districts, the largest number under any one person. Some of the Magira's fiefs have survived to the present day and are known in tradition as the settlement of a thousand slaves each. One interesting thing about the Queen

mother was that she made sure that all cases in the kingdom are adjudicated according to Islamic injunctions.

She did not only sit down to watch slaves work but also participated in some domestic work especially in the area of serving her husband. It is said that she always loved to cook for her husband and members of the royal household. She taught her son how to win the sympathy of the people of the kingdom. She continues advice Mai idris Aloomo to use diplomatic means in solving internal problems. On the whole, one will therefore not wrong to say that the administration of the Magira Aisa was a glorious one in the history of Kanem Borno and indeed in the Bilal-al-Sudan.

Beside the office of the Queen Mother, wives, sisters and daughters of ruler also play an important role in many ways. These women are occupied with household affairs either to organize or delegate into practice the daily activities. Their role is in many cases regarded as model for the women living outside the palace. The power they gained through their closeness to the ruler has to be considered as a chain of influence. The status of wives though is regarded lower than the Queen mothers or the Queen Sisters.

The next female title after the Queen mother is the first wife of Mai otherwise known as Gumsu. The office was created in Kukawa by Shehu Umar Ibn Mohammed El-kenemi along with that of the office of Ya-Maira in 1846. Therefore Ya-Gumsu is usually the most senior wife of the Shehu and she controls all females in the palace, which she carried out with the assistance of the other three wives of the Shehu. She equally prepares the usual meal of the Shehu which he himself eats personally. She is the most respected female title holder among all the female title holders in the palace. She was responsible for the women of the state and appointed military leaders from among courtiers. She live separately in the southern part of the palace. The nature of the administrative organization, and emphasis on the titles in the royal palace, also shows how large the royal family had been in those days. A system of reward and punishment existed in the royal palace, which gave the Gumsu a considerable amount of the power over the rest on the member of the royal family.

The first wife of the Shehu (Gumsu) was saddled with the responsibility of the welfare of the princess in the palace. They were well-looked after and given the necessary training which prepared them for their journey to their future husband homes. This earn them a lot of respect and prestige and admiration from their husband who were mostly the members of the Shehu's courts, eg. Provincial governors and mallams. The Gumsu was also given her own share of fiefs, which were administered by her representatives. The position and authority of the Gumsu is described as "the courtiers of Gumsu were sixty men, all of Nobel rank".

There were fifty slaves who work for her and twenty men on ground who went out to fight and who Maintained Gumsu's authority. Each one of the twenty men commanded thousands of slaves.

From all indications women wielded enormous power and influence in Kanem-Borno. It is interesting to note that the political participation of women in the affairs of state continued unaffected upto the reign of the El-kenemi dynasty. In spite of the few changes introduced within the system, Shehu Umar's mother remained Ya-Magira and his senior wife Ya-Gumsu. During the reign of Shehu Bukar and Hashim the ancient Sayfawa title of Ya-magaram (sisters of the king) was also revived.

The political participation of women in pre-colonial Borno was centred around the royal women. Ordinary women were not involved in the administration of the state. This was because it was only women at court who had any opportunity to play a political role in the kingdom. It may also be noted, that commoners were generally excluded from administration. Women were ranked by status, which was closely tied to their marital condition. Married women obtained a status related to that of their husband, while the divorced women who had not remarried formed a separate category called Zowar. There was a head of Zowar in every town who was responsible to title women at Kukawa.

The Zowar (leader of the unmarried women) also bore the title Maira, as Queen mother. A Maira's task can be divided into different areas. One aspect that all functionaries address by these titles have in common, is that they are concerned with social events or social affairs. The Maira Zowar most often has to organize or mobilise the unmarried women for different events. The title at the local level denotes an office not given to a woman from the royal lineage but a woman from among the common people. Attributes claimed for a good Maira Zowar and decisive for her election by the village community are sociality, deference, trustworthiness, cleverness, and friendliness. While her marital status is insignificant for the appointment.

In the olden days a Maira Zowar's responsibility was to cater to a large crowd at festivities (water, food etc) or a large labour force (planting, harvesting). Assisted by young men and together with unmarried women, she looked after the well-being of guests, for instance their accommodation. Individual travelers were also catered for by the Maira Zowar, especially if the village head had invited them. Sometimes, her matchmaking services were also employed. Furthermore, she had to arrange for collective labour on the farms of influential personalities. Her major task in this connection was to see to the preparation of food, transportation of food to the fields, and transportation of sorghum seedlings. In compensation for their work, the women were allowed to fill the empty food containers with sorghum and take them home.

The Maira Zowar was also responsible for organizing women who were to accompany male groups to other places; as female dancers with the musicians or to wrestling competition. In this case, they had to cheer their fighters with their ululation, waving hands, and shouts. Another aspect of the Maira Zowar's task was dissemination of information. She was informed about weddings and naming ceremony dates, so that she could make them known in the village and beyond. Her open house offered good opportunities. Furthermore, she was always invited to wedding and naming ceremonies where she could also spread the word.

### **Mode of Installation of the Female Title Holders**

Traditional modes of installation have been one of the most important characteristics of African societies where feudalism and feudal tendencies have continued to exist. It constitutes an important ceremonial aspect and mode of festivity along with other rituals very common to African cultures and tradition. For example while in Kanem-Borno and the Hausa States, installation rituals and other traditional ceremonies such as turbaning, marriage, Sallah celebrations and child circumcisions are known to be some of the commonest attributes and cultural traits, the Agwe and Yam festivals were annually celebrated, this formed an important segment of their cultural values fundamentally common to Igbo and Benin cultures and societies.

In Borno, all the relevant and most important cultures of the society have been moulded into the traditional system, and women thus perform an important role within the political setup. First and foremost, the role of the female title holders is mostly confined to the palace and the nature of their role functions in the actual sense is a replica of their gender status. Not only that the Borno system was designed in such a way that it caters for all the members of the ruling family as those closely associated to them. It was a sort of political accommodation, which checks the growth of opposition and possible rebellion and intrigues against the authority of the Mai or Shehu. Similarly, women have equally risen to positions of prominence during the reign of the Sayfawa dynasty which the El-Kanemi Shehu overthrew in 1846.

### **The Installation of Queen Mother**

The installation of the office of the Queen Mother was usually proclaimed by the Shettima Kanuribe, that all respects and traditions due to the Shehu are also due to her. Know you people that his royal highness said she is Ya-Maira. By Ya-Maira it is meant that all respect due to the Shehu is equally due to her. Kana-kauwa ganas is said to the Shehu as well as to her. Kana refers to the procedure of the spiritual bath of the deceased. The

kau (stone) was for placing on the corpse during the process of bathing the dead for the burial. This is said to the Ya-Maira and the Shehu on the occasion of their installation ceremony in order to remain them of the hereafter.

for her. After the official turbarning had been conducted the Shettima Kanuribe who was the spokesman of the Shehu on such occasions, declared as follows:

At the end of the installation, the Maira retires to her palace where she would be receiving prayers for the blessing of her new title by the princess. The Imam Mashidima, Imam Idaini, the Shettimawa and the Mallams as well as other title holders visit the Maira and pray for her a successful reign. For seven days the royal drum would be beaten and musicians from all corners of the state pay her homage in order to testify their open loyalty to her. Businessmen and other important dignitaries also troop in large numbers to her residence to greet her and congratulate her on her new installation. At the end of the seven the day of the installation, all festivities comes to an end.

#### **The Installation of Ya Gumsu**

The appointment of the Yagumsu is done ceremoniously from the palace in the centre of the female compound. She appears for the turbarning decorated with a traditional Kanuri gown known as Kororobchi and Bar Musa-Alkebbba wearing a round red Tunisian royal cap with a white piece of cloth round to the cap (turbaned with a white turban) zawa luwal. The ceremony is almost equivalent to the installation of a new Shehu. Thereafter, the Shehu's personal band was beaten and the royal trumpet blown on her to symbolize or announce the formal installation ceremony and the tumbal or Tambori beaten on her and another traditional drum known as the Maira normally beaten during installation ceremonies were also beaten by the members of the royal band of the Shehu. These traditional ceremonies and other formalities would be retained up to seven days when the Gumsu will be receiving traditional salutation and congratulatory messages from all the corners of the state.

However, during the sighting of the month of Ramadan in which Muslims all over the globe would commence the mandatory fasting of the month sanctioned for all Muslims, she cook for the first day of the fasting for the royal family as well as the Shehu and other traditional titles to eat the food in that respect, very large quantity of the food required along with other traditional refreshment came from her. Similarly, during Eld-elkabir, her rams were the first to be slaughtered by very powerful palace princes and Mallam Terab. She then provides enough Kolanuts, snacks, sugar, sweetened groundnut and some food items and drinks for them. They lastly pay homage to her and pray for the Almighty Allah to enable them witness the

forthcoming year's festival. Other wives of the Shehu and concubines pay homage to her as well.

#### **The Installation of Ya Morom**

The office of the Ya Morom and Ya Doma were introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by Shehu Bukar Garbai, who was the first Shehu of Borno emirate under the British rule (1902 – 1922). They discharge important functions in the affairs of the state and their fiefs were among the largest in the kingdom. The Morom is the daughter of the Mai. The title is not only granted to one official sister but to all daughters of a ruling Mai during their marriage. She is appointed within or outside the royal family but what is generally required in the criteria of appointment to such office by the Shehu and some of his close advisers is maturity, confidence, loyalty and trust so that she cannot betray the Shehu and the installation in general. As such, all the female title holders owe and swear a lot of allegiance to the Shehu who appoints them to their various capacities. A woman, bearing the Morom can also be the sister of the acting Mai. The installation of Ya-Morom is exactly the same with that of Ya-Maira and Ya Gumsu. It is the responsibility of the Morom to help in preparing food at the occasion of festivities in the Mais palace and to conduct certain rituals, such as preparation of ritual food (biduwum) on sallah, the celebration after the fasting period.

During the preparations, the deceased relatives of the previous Mai are remembered by reciting their names and forming lumps (bolo) of dough. Like in other ruling houses, her marriage is often used to establish desirable connections. But apart from the consolidation of social relationships between the families involved in the marriage, the event itself is of great significance for the Morom to be at wedding ceremony, actions necessary for her turbanisation, and rituals only conducted in the context of the conferment of the Morom title are linked and not clearly distinguishable. All this makes her installation together with that of the Mai the most complex form of turbanisation.

#### **The Installation of Yado'oma**

It is the next title that follows Ya-Morom in the hierarchy of female title holders in Borno. She is equally a princess, like the Ya-Morom, she lived outside the palace, while the Ya-Maira and Ya Gumsu have their residence within the Mais palace. Hierarchically, the Dooma is perhaps the least among the female title holders both in terms of rank and influence. But in any case she stands powerful recognition both from the Mai himself and other palace female title holders and the women and people of Borno. She is equally entitled to a piece of land as fief and the residence of her land accord has a lot of respect and they give her proceeds of the land from the seasonal farming.

However, the actual date for the origin of the office is not certain. But it could be a recent 20<sup>th</sup> century innovation under the post-Rabi Shehus of Borno. It is quite probable that the first Shehu of Borno emirate, Shehu Abubakar Garbai Ibn Ibrahim El-Kanemi (1901 – 1922) introduced the office and title of Ya-Morom and Ya-Do'oma respectively. However, just like ya Morom, the Do'oma of Borno is selected among the princess and her installation ritual is exactly the same with that of the Ya-Morom.

She is called Ya Do'oma because she arbitrates cases from the female royal family. She also assist Ya-Maira and Ya-Morom in supplying special ceremonial dishes to the Shehu during Sallah days and on special occasions or on Friday when both the princess and other title holders would assemble in the palace of the Shehu to eat the traditional meal.

Appointment as ya Maira, Ya-Morom and Ya-Do'oma does not disturb the normal marital relationship they had with their husbands and therefore they are regarded as very important personalities to the Shehu. Sometimes the husbands of such female title holder are given title as Shettima and Mala. Each and every title holder turbaned by the Shehu must pay due respect to them and apart from the Shehu and the Waziri, traditional respect to these female title holders by others is a mandatory exercise. For example when a district head, a village head or any other title holder is turbaned, he is to mount on his horse and pay respect to the Waziri after he had been formally installed by the Shehu and then mounts to the Magira's palace, then to the Ya Mo'orom and Ya Do'oma respectively.

### **The Role of Women in Socio-Economic Activities**

The socio-economic activities of women in pre-colonial Borno were to a large extent similar to those of women in other parts of the country. The early arrival of Islam to the court of the Mai in the 11<sup>th</sup> century made its intervention and influence in the lives of the people very important. However, it did not absolutely stop women from practicing certain traditional activities. Parts of the greater activities of women were tied to domestic matters, as was the tradition in other communities. They were responsible for cooking for the family, drawing water from the well and taking care of the children. It was also the responsibility of women to train small girls according to the societal norms up to the time they will be married.

The Lake Chad provided and continues to provide a good fishing ground in Borno history. The Buduma and Bede are the chief fishermen of Borno. Women and girls assisted in the fishing process. Both men and women engaged in the preparation of fish particularly the smoking and drying process. Some of the Shuwa and Kanembu tribes of Borno are pastoral peoples. Both men and women milk the cattle, but the women alone churn the milk. Kanuri women partake in harvesting

and beating the corn in motars and winnowing. Farms are generally worked on the family system. But periodic cooperation (*Surwa* in kanuri and *Gayya* in Hausa) is common among all the tribes, a man's friends turning out to help him when the farm work is heavy.

Women usually join in all farming work except the heavier forms of hoeing and reaping. The small home farms near the villages are generally worked by women and children. Among the Bolewa, women are expected to work for three or four days a week on their husbands' farms and the remaining three on their own farm. While women among the Tera, Jera, Babur Bura and Bata work three days out of seven on their Husbands forms as well.

The pottery, calabash and soap making industries are to a large extent women's work. They produce pots for cooking and eating as well as for burning incense. These local industries provide income for the women which they used in maintaining themselves and their families. Socially, activities of women were shaped by social norms. This greatly affected their rights and participation in societal functions. For example, in terms of mate selection women were not allowed to choose their own husbands in case of a first marriage, but their parents did the selection for them.

In Kanuri tradition, parents were responsible for choosing husbands for their daughters. In this way some were married to certain people such as an Islamic teacher, a respected person in the community as reward for the services he rendered to the family or the community. A father could even give his daughter in marriage to his friend in order to strength the friendship between them. The divorced women had little or no respect in the society. Traditionally divorced women were organized under titled female relations of the Mai, the Maira. The independent or free/unmarried women consist of widows (Kamba) as well as of divorce (Zowar).

The Zowor were free in their private life and they mingled with men in certain activities. The residences of these unmarried often develop into so-called women's houses (Kanuri: Zoworti). These are compounds where unmarried women live together in separate rooms let by the female owners-usually for some weeks, sometimes only for days. The houses of women are not only inhabited by women selling their sexual services but by other independent women as well. If a larger number of women is required, they are often recruited from the networks of the leader of free women.

One of the Maira Zowar's responsibilities is that she organized the divorced women to cook food for the military call-ups when large numbers of males assembled in the capital. Local Maira Zowar in each town and village repeated such duties. This no doubt



must have constituted social problems in Kanuri communities. Perhaps it was as a result of their activities that El-Kanemi attempted to stamp out prostitution in Kukawa and introduced some changes in marriage along the Sharia law.

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