

## Ibrahim Maina Waziri

The *Chima* Fiefdom System in  
Kanem-Bornu and its Transformation  
into District Head Administration in  
British Borno, Northern Nigeria  
(19th and 20th Centuries)

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## Introduction

The study of the *Chima* system in pre-colonial and colonial Borno provides a context of African history that could be of interest to the Conference “Current Trends in Slavery Studies in Brazil” of the Cluster of Excellence “Beyond Slavery and Freedom”, to overcome the “binary opposition of ‘slavery versus freedom’” of University of Bonn. Indeed, the paper adopted this “methodology and theoretical perspectives” of “Slavery Studies as one of the fields in ‘Brazilian historiography’,” in “global perspectives on slavery and the slave trade,” and the “Atlantic connections” extrapolated to the Central Sudanic-cum-Nigerian historical context in the nineteenth and twentieth century, which gives efficacy to this presentation of the *Chima* system in pre-colonial and colonial Kanem-Bornu under the British as a neglected academic discourse on the global trend of the concept of “freedom and slavery.” This is because it gives another insight into how an administrative system developed and operated in pre-colonial sub-Saharan African kingdom Kanem-Borno is seen as feudal, a distinct form of lack of freedom internally driven, which also became transformed and adapted under the British into an externally imposed exploitative colonial “indirect” rule that connotes a complete lack of independence as one of the most heinous inhumanity of man to man after the Atlantic slave trade in the twentieth century. The significance of this aspect of British colonialisation, is its adoption and adaptation of an indigenous form of “absentee landlord” administration into the new colonial administrative set-up policy of ruling indirectly through the traditional political system, as it suited the British colonialist, which by extension and implication provides a wide scope for critical analyses and interrogation of what constitutes “freedom and lack of it in any given historical context.”

The historical context of this study in the Kanem-Bornu Empire is also significant as one of the African states with the longest history of political existence, lasting from at least the first to the nineteenth century. This is documented in both written and oral sources from internal and external materials, such as the *Diwan* and *Girgam* (chronicles and

king lists) of the rulers of Kanem-Bornu, documents written in Arabic that recount the royal genealogy of the empire over the period of a thousand years.<sup>1</sup> There is also *Infraq al-Mansur*, a history of the Sokoto Jihad written in 1813,<sup>2</sup> the *Girgams* (chronicles) of the neighbouring kingdoms of Mandara and Bole Fikka, which documented contacts and relations between these groups and Bornu since the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> In addition, there are the oral traditions that give insight to the extant history of Kanem-Bornu, like the Saif b. Yazin and the Bayyajida legends.<sup>4</sup> The external sources for the history of Kanem-Bornu are mostly written in Arabic, such as texts by Ibn Sa'id; al-Qalqashandi; al-Maqrizi; Ibn Majaa; Ibn Qutayba; al-Yaqubi and al-Masud among others, writing in the ninth and tenth centuries.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the early kings of Kanem-Bornu were the Zaghâwa in Kanem up to 1075 AD and were replaced by the *Mais* of the Sefuwa dynasty. The subsequent long reign from the ninth to the nineteenth century and extensive state system that emerged under the Sefuwa dynasty is one of reasons why Kanem-Borno was considered as one of great African states that existed. The documented details of the history of Kanem-Bornu under the Sefuwa dynasty (1064–1804 AD), the *Shehu* or El-Kanem dynasty (1804–1893 and 1901/1903 to date 2023) and subsequently Rabih Fadlallah's short reign (1893–1901) are pro-

<sup>1</sup> Dierk Lange, *The Founding of Kanem by Assyrian Refugees ca. 600 BCE: Documentary, Linguistic, and Archaeological Evidence*, ASC Working Papers in African Studies Series 265 (Boston: African Studies Center, 2011): 6–7.

<sup>2</sup> Muhammad Bello b. al Shaykh Uthman, *Ifraq al-Mansur fi tarikh bilad al-Tukur* (London/Cairo: Abubakar Gumi, 1960).

<sup>3</sup> Bawuro M. Barkindo, "Kanem-Borno: Its Relations with the Mediterranean Sea, Bagirmi and Other States in the Chad Basin," in *General History of Africa*, vol. 5, *Africa from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Bethwell Allan Ogot (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1992): 521; Bawuro M. Barkindo, "Origins and History of the Sultanate of Mandara" (PhD diss., Ahmadu Bello University, 1980); Dymitr Ibriszimow, *Bole Language and Documentation Unit: BOLDU Report II*, Westafrikanische Studien 13 (Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe, 1996): 14–147.

<sup>4</sup> Lange, *The Founding of Kanem*: 6–7; Abdullahi Smith, "The Legend of the Safuwa: A Study in the Origins of a Legend of Origin," in *Studies in the History of Pre-colonial Borno*, ed. Bala Usman and Muhammad Nur Alkali (Zaria: Northern Nigeria Publishing Company NNPC, 1983): 16–56; Muhammad Nur Alkali, "Kanem-Borno under the Sayfawa: A Study of Origin, Growth and Collapse of a Dynasty" (PhD diss., Ahmadu Bello University, 1978).

<sup>5</sup> Nahemia Levzion and John Hopkins, *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

vided in many sources.<sup>6</sup> There are also sources that dwelt on the period of the scramble for and partition of Africa by the European colonial powers following the 1884–85 Berlin conference that sanctioned the partition and colonialisation of Africa in the nineteenth century. Borno in the Chad basin was a victim as shown in the sources that documented the nature, trends in the operations, functions, and the various changes effected on the *Chima* system in the period under study.<sup>7</sup>

The background history of Kanem-Bornu is significant to show its importance in African, indeed in global history. This includes its significant strategic location as a player in the relationship between North Africa, the Sahara Desert, and the central Sudan in sub-Saharan pre-colonial period, and how that was exploited under colonial rule by the involvement of the European powers emanating from the Atlantic trade and colonialism in twentieth-century Africa. In fact, since the thirteenth to fourteenth century, the first Kanemi state under the Sefuwa dynasty

<sup>6</sup> Smith, “The Legend of the Safuwa”: 16–56; Smith, “Early States of Central Sudan,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman 1974): 158–201; John E. Lavers, “Kanem and Borno to 1808,” in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1999): 187–209; Alkali, “Kanem-Borno under the Sayfawa”: 114–15; Graham Connah, “Some Contributions of Archaeology to the Study of the History of Borno,” in *Studies in the History of Pre-colonial Borno*, ed. Bala Usman and Muhammad Nur Alkali (Zaria: Northern Nigeria Publishing, 1983): 7–8; Graham Connah, *Three Thousand Years in Africa. Man, and his Environment in the Lake Chad Region of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988): 215–19.

<sup>7</sup> J. Spencer Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962): 55–60; Roland Oliver and John D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa*, 6th ed. (London: Penguin, 1988 [1st ed. 1962]): 35, 680–83; Christopher Ehret, *The Civilizations of Africa. A History to 1800* (Oxford: James Currey, 2002): 232; Louis Brenner, *The Shehus of Kukawa: A History of the al-Kanemi Dynasty of Bornu* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Ivan Hrbek, “Relations with the Maghrib and West Africa, Egypt’s role in Africa,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 3, *From c. 1050 to c. 1600*, ed. Roland Oliver (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 86–95, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/cambridge-history-africa-volume-3> [accessed 21.08.2022]; H.J. Fisher, “States of the Central Sudan, Iron, Horses and Guns, The Penetration of Islam,” in *The Cambridge History of Africa*, vol. 3, *From c. 1050 to c. 1600*, ed. Roland Oliver (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 287–305; Dierk Lange, “The Founding of Kanem”: 6–7; Kyari Mohammed, “Borno under Rabiḥ Fādī Allāh, 1893–1900: The Emergence of a Predatory State,” *Paideuma* 43 (1997): 281–300; Ibrahim Alhaji Modu, Abubakar Mohammed and Aji Lawan, “The Emergence of Sheikh Muhammad El-Amin El-Kanemi and the Involvement and Advancement of Shuwa Arabs in State Affairs 1808–1837,” *International Journal of Research* 8, no. 5 (2021): 468–77.

collapsed due to political and socio-economic reasons and forced the *Mais* of the Sefuwa dynasty to abandon Kanem in the eastern part of the Lake Chad basin in the thirteenth century. They relocated their state to their second state base in Bornu in the western part of the Lake Chad basin by the fourteenth century. Therefore, in the fourteenth century the Sefuwa dynasty succeeded in re-establishing the state, which comprises most of the eastern or *Kanem* and western or *Bornu* parts of the Lake Chad basin.<sup>8</sup> Historically, this state came to be known as Kanem-Bornu, which became strategically placed in an advantageous position within the Chad basin, with its capital at Birnin Ngazargamo close to Lake Chad and its tributaries that form its main physical features and the foci of most of the activities of the state. This includes trade and cultural exchanges between peoples living north of the Sahara and people to the south of the Lake Chad basin. Indeed, Lake Chad was both an important refuge and an area of diverse populations that became consolidated under the authority of states like Kanem-Borno, Wadai, Baghirmi, Mandara etc., from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries. Thus, Smith rightly observed that Kanem-Bornu history centred on the “the Lake Chad basin as a crossroad for trade between west and east” of the central Sudan.<sup>9</sup> It has also been asserted that this development came about from the “first millennium AD” onwards when the camel was introduced into the area, which led the Zaghâwa (an ethnic group from Fezzän, north-eastern Chad, and western Sudan) and the Tubu (a Saharan ethnic group) to become involved in the long-distance trade across the Sahara desert to its far northern border and the extreme southern parts of the Lake Chad basin.<sup>10</sup> Also, it gave rise to commerce with the Nile Valley through Darfur, Kordofan and the Garamantes in Fezzän, who organized the long-distance trade since the seventh century with traders from the Mediterranean coast using the central Saharan trade route to the Lake Chad basin too.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Lake Chad area functioned as crossroads from northern Africa into the Central African savannah and Sahel zones,

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<sup>8</sup> Smith, “The Early States of Central Sudan”: 156 with notes 9 and 10.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

rather than as a bottleneck.<sup>12</sup> Graham Connah also supported that the Lake Chad was a crossroads or a “bottleneck” into Central African savannah and Sahel zones.<sup>13</sup>



Map 1: Kanem-Borno.

## Conceptual Framework

This study aims to analyse the *Chima* system in pre-colonial and colonial Borno as human and natural resources’ administrative management under different political systems. The definitions of the *Chima* system varied from that of Kanem-Bornu in pre-colonial history from the ninth to the nineteenth centuries and its adoption into the colonial administration of Borno Province in the twentieth century. The views are of the *Chima* system as feudal institutional structure of Kanem-Borno kingdom, which functioned as an administrative machinery for revenue collection, fief management and the territorial control of largesse given to the

<sup>12</sup> Dierk Lange and Bawuro W. Barkindo, “The Chad Region as a Crossroads,” in *General History of Africa*, ed. M. El-Fasi (Paris: Heinemann Educational Books, 1988): 436–60.

<sup>13</sup> Connah, “Some Contributions of Archaeology to the Study of the History of Borno”: 26; Lange and Barkindo, “The Chad Region as a Crossroads”: 436–60.

titleholders by the pre-colonial rulers of Borno.<sup>14</sup> In this instance, Smith opined that “the political structure of the first empire” of Borno under the Sefuwa dynasty, relates to the period of military expansionism under *Mai* Dunoma Dibbalemi, which gave rise to the *maina* class (princes) and is related to the “ascendency of the feudal system, giving rise to a coterie of titles like *arjinoma*, *musterema*, *yerima*, *tegoma* – including offices of the royal household such as *musterema*, chief eunuch; *ciroma* (*chiroma*), heir apparent to the throne, all indicative of potential fief holders.”<sup>15</sup> Bawuro Barkindo also states that “the *magram*, the official sister of the *Mai* or ruler of Kanem-Bornu under the Sefuwa dynasty, was the holder of the largest number of fiefs in the state, and most princes resided outside the palace and were strictly controlled although some were given fiefs.”<sup>16</sup> The *Chima* system permeated the *majlis*, the highest council of state under the king, which was composed of twelve royal, religious, and military notables like the *chiroma*, *talba*, *yerima*, *kaigama* and *galadima*. Other notables included the king’s four titled wives, headed by the *gumsu* (head wife), the *maina* (princes) and the *mairatin* (princesses), the *magira* (*magara*) (queen-mother), and the *magram* (the king’s official sister), the powerful slaves of the king who controlled the towns, villages and ethnic units grouped into *chidi* (fiefs) with all these major officials of state as the *chimas* (fief-holders). They maintained order, collected taxes, raised troops for the army in their fiefs. All except for the *galadima* (a high-ranking official as provincial governor of the west or *galadi*) resided in the capital and represented by their *chima gana* (junior fief holders) in their fief-holdings held at the pleasure of the king or *Mai*, who had the right to confiscate, reduce or re-arrange their holdings.<sup>17</sup> In the same regard, Alkali states that “the *Mai* was the ‘owner of the land’ (*Kema*

<sup>14</sup> Abdulkadir Benisheikh, “The Revenue System of the Government of Borno in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Studies in Pre-Colonial History of Borno*, ed. Bala Usman and Muhammad Nur Alkali (Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1983): 78–100; Lavers, “Kanem and Borno to 1808”: 187–209; Muhammad Nur Alkali, “Economic Factors in the History of Borno under the Seifuwa,” in *Studies in the History of Pre-Colonial Borno*, ed. B. Usman and Muhammad Nur Alkali (Zaria: Northern Nigerian Publishing Company, 1983): 57–77; Barkindo, “Kanem-Borno”: 492–514.

<sup>15</sup> Smith, “The Early States of Central Sudan”: 175–76.

<sup>16</sup> Barkindo, “Kanem-Borno”: 511.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

*Lardema*). Any piece of land acquired by the process of conquest or submission belonged to him. A centrally controlled system of distribution of land as fiefs with the government officials exercising supervisory powers. They were responsible for the control of the land resources – which were basically agricultural – for the benefit of the government.”<sup>18</sup> The senior fief holders, *Chima Kura*, were resident in the capital, made up of the members of the royal family (*Mairiwu*, *Maruma*), the *Mai*’s council or *Majlis* and the *kaunawa* (executives), who were represented in their respective fiefs by subordinates known as *Chima Gana*.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, according to Alkali, “the *Chima* system seems to have extended the authority of the government to the local inhabitants of their territories through the local heads – the *Bulama* and *Maruma*”.<sup>20</sup> Hiribarren on the other hand states that in metropolitan Bornu, a double fief system enabled the *Mais* and later the *Shehus* to levy taxes and troops in their empire. The first one was a personal fief where the fief holder, the *chima jilibe*, owned a fief over people, the second one was territorial: here the fief holder, the *chima chidibe*, oversaw a specific territory. This system enabled the empire to control its sedentary population as well as incorporating its nomadic or semi-nomadic subjects such as the Shuwa Arabs. This administrative structure was present in metropolitan Bornu, whereas a local ruler still administered the satellite regions. For example, the sultanate of Zinder was semiautonomous but still part of the Kanem-Bornu Empire until the middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Cohen and Brenner in their assertions state that “the organisation of Bornu administration was a simple, yet flexible system that allowed for change, catastrophe, patronage, and incorporation of ethnic or occupational groups as whole or parts”: this is the crux of the fact about the dynamics of the *Chima* system.<sup>22</sup> This flexibility very much contributed

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<sup>18</sup> Alkali, “Economic Factors in the History of Borno under the Seifuwa”: 69–70.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*: 70.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Vicent Hiribarren, “Kanem-Bornu Empire,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Empire*, ed. Nigel Dalziel and John McKenzie, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118455074.wbeoe014>.

<sup>22</sup> Ronald Cohen and Louis Brenner, “Bornu in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman 1974):

to a smooth shift of authority from the Sefuwa to the El-Kanemi dynasty, and by extension, one may add to the wresting of the state system militaristically by Rabih, too. Indeed, Cohen and Brenner emphasised the fact that:

All titled nobles of the royal court held the office of *Chima Kura*, or senior fief holders. Some of these (the *Chima Kura Chidebe*) held the rights in settled, and usually dispersed, villages and were represented in these fiefs by a trusted and obedient client, the *Chima Gana*, or junior fief holder, who was a free or slave client or a relative of the senior fief holder. He acted as the representative of the interests of the senior fief holder in the local area and served as a link between the locally based leadership and the central administration of the state.<sup>23</sup>

In the same context, Benisheikh gives more details that, “traditionally, the Shehu as the sovereign was vested with ownership of land in Borno under the El-Kanemi dynasty as part of the system of state administration, which also was a part of the system of taxation.”<sup>24</sup> It is instructive that “all land belonged to the Shehu, he wielded the power of parceling out the territories into fiefs which were placed under the control of fief holders (in Kanuri-*Chima Kura*) who with the exception of garrison commanders resided in the capital Kukawa and were assisted by subordinates (*Chima Gana*).” Benesheikh also asserts that “allocation of fiefs was fundamentally devised as a means of remunerating the key government functionaries” including provisions “for the members of the royal family” enfeoffed by the *Shehu*.<sup>25</sup> Modu et al. (2021) state that from 1804 to 1809 as an aftermath of the Sokoto Jihad in Hausa land, the Fellata Borno rebellion under the leadership of Ardo Lerlima, Ibrahim Zaki, Sambo Digimsa and Goni Mukhtar triggered the attack and sacking of the capital, Birni Ngazargamo in 1808. In 1809, Ibra-

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119; see also Ronald Cohen, “The Dynamics of Feudalism in Bornu in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Boston Papers on Africa*, vol. 2, *African History*, ed. Jeffrey Butler (Boston: Boston University Press, 1964): 87–105.

<sup>23</sup> Cohen and Brenner, “Bornu in the Nineteenth Century”: 119.

<sup>24</sup> Benisheikh, “The Revenue System of the Government of Borno”: 79.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*: 79–80.

him Zaki again captured Birni Ngazargamo.<sup>26</sup> This forced the Saifawa *Mais* Ahmed and Dunoma to desperately look for help. They turned to the scholar and political leader El-Kanemi on both occasions, as he had established his ability as a successful field fighter against Fellata rebels in northern Borno. The second request led El-Kanemi to request for compensation of a land as fief around Ngurno. Ngurno offered good grazing sites for the cattle of the Shuwa Arabs supporters of El-Kanemi and his close confidantes Mallam Tirab, Ibrahim Wadaima and Ahmed Gonimi showing the classical importance of *Chima* system in promoting social mobility, collective preservation and security from common internal and external enemies alike. Later, El-Kanemi took for himself title of Sheikh and established a new capital at Kukawa in 1814, where he founded his council of state – the *majlis* as the highest decision-making body of the state, seen as making him the *de facto* ruler of Borno.<sup>27</sup> El-Kanemi's councillors were six comrades, namely, Muhammad Terab, Ibrahim Wadaima and Ahmed Gonimi, all Shuwa Arab gentlemen: Mallam Tatari, Shettima Kubri and Muhammad Hajj Sudani. Interestingly, each councillor had specific territories as fiefs, such as Ahmad Gonimi, for instance, controlled the area running from Monguno, Marte, Kukawa and Ele. Ibrahim Wadaima the Ngumati region, and Muhammad Terab oversaw the Firki areas of Borno, Ngala, Kala and Rann.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, according to Adam, reflecting on the history of Borno, “a fief is a pre-colonial territorial unit of administration placed under the charge of a trusted courtier, military commander, member of the ruling family or a local leader who had submitted himself to the rule of a conquering power.”<sup>29</sup> It is also an instructive extrapolation to assume that Rabih Fadllah's exploit in Borno from 1893, when he invaded, defeated, and replaced the El-Kanemi dynasty as the ruler of Borno, accentuated the *Chima* system with his commanders and remnant members of the El-

<sup>26</sup> Modu et al., “The Emergence of Sheikh Muhammad El-Amin El-Kanemi”: 468–77.

<sup>27</sup> Brenner, *The Shehus*: 37–38; Modu et al., “The Emergence of Sheikh Muhammad El-Amin El-Kanemi”: 468–71.

<sup>28</sup> Modu et al., “The Emergence of Sheikh Muhammad El-Amin El-Kanemi”: 471–72; A. Mohammed Adam, *Major Landmarks in the Political History of Dikwa Emirate since 1900* (Lagos: Kola Printing Industries, 2015): 124.

<sup>29</sup> Adam, *Major Landmarks in the Political History of Dikwa Emirate since 1900*: 124.

Kanem dynasty in Borno, who associated with him as his beneficiaries. As confirmed by Hallam, “immediately after the fall of Kukawa” Rabih “ensured the continuation of the administration in Borno with that part of Borno under his direct administration divided into districts and allotted as fiefdoms to the ruling aristocracy and councillors.”<sup>30</sup> Rabih appointed his followers as fief holders in place of Borno aristocrats and the main fief holders of Rabih were:

**Table 1:** The main fief holders of Rabih.

<u>Fief holders</u>	<u>Fiefs</u>
Babikir:	Gashegar and Lumburam districts
Fadl Allah:	Maiduguri
Muhammad Nyebe:	Marghi and Kilba districts
Gadem:	Kapchi (south Maiduguri)
It:	Gumsa (south Dikwa)
Faki Ahmad al-Kabir:	Kuliwa (near Ladi Bida)
Tokoloma:	part of Kerikeri
Abba Shu’aib:	park of Kerikeri
Ahmad wad Brahim:	Kala-Balge (east Dikwa)
Razik Allah:	Bodo (Kotoko)
Hamaden:	Manga
Kapsur:	Biu
Faki Ahmad as-Saghir:	Magumeri
‘Abd as-Sid:	Mofoti (Kotoko)
Fatr al-Mola:	Afade
Sharif Muhhammad Ijele:	Bulabutu and Sharifuri
Agid ‘Ali Karabiri:	Northern Gujba. <sup>31</sup>

This was a far-reaching replacement of fiefdoms documented in pre-colonial Borno, although under Rabih still the fief holders stayed in the town of Dikwa and had *wakils* (like the *Chima Gana*) from their banner

<sup>30</sup> William Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah* (Ilfracombe: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1977): 158.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.: 159.

followers or former Borno district chiefs, resident in the districts, with small detachments of soldiers indicating the militaristic attitude to governance. These *wakils* wielded considerable powers, particularly when drawn from Rabih's own banner, noted for gross abuse of their positions. One example is the case of Jallabi Usman Kasuguma, the *wakil* in Ngala, who beat the Ngalama, the local leader *Mai* Umar to death without any action taken against him by Rabih, who just appointed *Mai* Ari Gumsuri as his successor.<sup>32</sup> It is therefore apparent that the patterns were the same in the usage and function of the *Chima* system in Bornu in the pre-colonial period as an administrative tool, with the different trends at the disposition of the leadership and the prevailing circumstances at any given time. Thus, the distinction between the *Mais* of the Sefuwa dynasty and the *Shehus* of the El-Kanemi dynasty. The former were faced with expansionism and how to manage territoriality adequately in the interest of the state, the ruling class as well as the complex myriad of dependencies for over a thousand years in an extensive geo-political formation in Kanem and Bornu; while for the latter it was the problem of how to address the issues of internal decay, rebellion, and supplanting and replacing an establishment without jeopardising the entire system of government by a completely new ruling class. In the case of Rabih Fadl Allah, it was a completely new ball game: an intruding, ambitious, over-zealous militant, hungry for power in the more complicated and complex environment of late nineteenth-century politics in the Chad basin, where European colonialism versus the political and socio-economic realities of the time had a tumultuous militaristic impact that came on top of the disruptions and destructions wrought about by the Sokoto Jihad and Fellata rebellion in Bornu, Hausa land and elsewhere.

Hence from the fore going, *Chima* system conforms with the conception of its being another form of feudal relationship in an African state: Kanem-Borno Empire in pre-colonial times.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the *Chima* system

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.: 159–60.

<sup>33</sup> For the definition of fief see, <http://www.lordsandladies.org/fief.htm>; and <https://www.britannica.com/topic/fief> [both accessed on 28.11.2020]; Mark Cartwright, "Feudalism," *World History Encyclopedia*, <https://www.worldhistory.org/Feudalism/> [accessed 23.08.2022], also for a critical discourse of feudalism in West Africa see Amady Aly Dieng, *Social Classes as Feudal Mode of Production in West Africa* [trans-

of Kanem-Bornu is an admixture of the management of the productive resource base of the empire under the local absentee landlord and their representatives. The economics of this socio-political formation includes a comprehensive, efficient, and effective control and use of both human and material resources for the stability and prosperity of the state system, particularly for the ruling class, up to the end of the nineteenth century. Therefore, this study of the *Chima* system in pre-colonial Bornu gives us the background of its dynamics as an administrative instrument employed by the state in managing the complex territorial expansionism and the maintenance of royalty, service, security, and efficient revenue appropriation at any given period. It was this *modus operandi* employed by the leadership of Bornu in pre-colonial times that became incorporated into the colonial administration of British Bornu, which forms the crux of this study. As such, this information on the *Chima* system, from the ninth and particularly the nineteenth century allows us to compare and assess the changes wrought about by British colonization of Bornu Province. More so its adaptation as part of the new so-called indirect rule, under the British colony of Northern Nigeria from 1903 and the Nigerian colony up to independence in 1960. British incorporation and colonialisaton processes, transformed Bornu in the twentieth century as part of colonial Nigeria.

## Colonial Rule in Bornu and the Transformation of the *Chima* System

A combination of many factors made the 1880s a watershed in the history of the Europeans' growing interest in Africa, particularly the growth and development of the industrial revolution, which altered European politics and economic needs towards Africa from that of "free trade" to "protectionism."<sup>34</sup> The intense rivalry between Britain and France on the

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lation from original French], Dakar Reproductions 384 (Dakar: African Institute for Economic Development and Planning, 1975).

<sup>34</sup> John D. Hargreaves, "The European Partition of West Africa," in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman 1974): 409–12;

one hand, and between them and Germany on the other, set the stage for the Berlin Conference of 1884/85, which precipitated the scramble for and partition of West Africa.<sup>35</sup> In this study, our interest is in the rivalry among the French, German, British and Portuguese in the Niger-Benue valley, the Congo and the Chad basin, that affected Borno under Articles 34 and 35 of the Berlin Act of 1885. This Act provided the legal and doctrinal basis to the European powers for the scramble and partition of Borno, following the declaration of a protectorate over the Niger-District by Britain. By the virtue of the doctrine of “spheres of influence” and its “effective occupation” as provided under the said Articles 34 and 35, Borno since 1885 was declared, if not *de facto* at least *de jure*, a hinterland of the Niger District protectorate (a concept that implied ownership).<sup>36</sup> This was apparently assumed by the supposed extent of the Royal Niger Company’s sphere of influence, which was understood to have extended from the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean up to Lake Chad in Central African Sudan after the grant of its Royal Charter in 1886.<sup>37</sup> In same regard, a “Protectorate” was a political device by the various European powers to protect their commercial interests and their traders against threats and rivalry from opponents or rival European power(s). In theory, a protectorate was therefore merely a political device of partial colonial control, where a foreign power supervised the external relations of another polity to secure its own interest, leaving

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John E. Flint and E. Ann McDougall, “Economic Change in West Africa in the Nineteenth Century,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman 1974): 397–99. For details see Ibrahim Maina Waziri, *Colonial Export Trade of Borno Province, Northern Nigeria: 1902–1945* (Ibadan: Loud Books, 2008).

<sup>35</sup> Antony Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa* (Longman: London, 1982): 159–64.

<sup>36</sup> Robert J. Gavin and J.A. Betley, *The Scramble for Africa* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1973): 128–288; Godfrey Uzoigwe, “European Partition and Conquest of Africa. An Overview,” in *General History of Africa, VII: Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935*, ed. Albert Adu Boahen (London/Berkeley: Unesco/Heinemann Educational/University of California Press, 1985): 14–22; Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa*: 135; Hargreaves, “The European Partition”: 407–16; Anthony I. Asiwaju, “The Conceptual Framework,” in *Partitioned Africans Ethnic Relations across Africa’s Boundaries 1884–1984*, ed. Anthony I. Asiwaju (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1984): 1–19.

<sup>37</sup> Uzoigwe, “European Partition and Conquest of Africa”: 29; Alan Burns, *History of Nigeria*, 8th ed. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972): 150–51.

that polity to freely maintain and manage its internal affairs.<sup>38</sup> Even though no treaty of protection was concluded with any European powers by the *Shehus* of Borno up to 1893 when Rabih Fadl Allah invaded and toppled the *Shehus* as the rulers of Borno, the 1884/85 Berlin conference laid down the rule for the partition of Borno and the areas in the Central African region.<sup>39</sup> The Rabih interlude (i.e. 1893–1900) was also a period of struggle between the French and the British to get the support of Rabih in Borno, so as to consolidate their unmarked, supposed protectorates in Borno and the Lake Chad region.

The significance of Rabih Fadl Allah and his son in Borno, was that it brought intense European attention on Borno and the Chad basin. As a result, on 1 January 1900, Colonel Frederick Lugard commanding the West African Frontier Force declared the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria under British colonial rule.<sup>40</sup> On 22 April 1900, France defeated and killed Rabih,<sup>41</sup> and his son Fadl Allah on 31 August 1901.<sup>42</sup> The British responded in despatching the lower Borno expedition under Colonel Morland in 1902 to occupy Borno as a counter measure to France. Colonel Morland declared Abubakar Garbai, the heir of El-Kanemi dynasty, as the *Shehu* of “British” Borno, on the condition of stopping payment of the indemnity (80,000 Maria Theresa dollars) charged by the French for killing Rabih and his son, with which the *Shehu* complied.<sup>43</sup> The imposition of British colonial rule, its philosophy of administration and economic orientation from 1902, including the incorporation of the *Chima* system, forms the focus of attention of this study. In this context, Borno Province refers to that part of the Borno Kingdom which became part of British colonial territory of Nigeria from 1902–1960, which lies between

<sup>38</sup> A. A. Fari, “The Annexation of the Niger Benue: A Study in Anglo-African Relations Between 1850 and 1901” (PhD diss., University of Liverpool, 1986): 296.

<sup>39</sup> Hallam, *The Life and Times of Rabih Fadl Allah*: 125–32.

<sup>40</sup> Burns, *History of Nigeria*: 388; Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*: 178–79.

<sup>41</sup> Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*: 181; Mahmud Tukur, “The Imposition of British Colonial Domination on the Sokoto Caliphate, Borno, and Neighbouring States 1894–1914. A Reinterpretation of Colonial Sources” (PhD diss., Ahmadu Bello University, 1979): 100.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.; Martin Z. Njeuma, *Fulani Hegemony in Yola (Old Adamawa) 1809–1902* (Yaoundé: Publishing and Production Centre for Teaching and Research, 1978): 201.

degrees 10°30' and 14° N latitude and 10° and 14° E longitude. The physical boundaries are, to the east, Lake Chad and the Yedseram River; to the south, the ranges, and plateaus of Chibok, through Babur and Tera, to the Gongola River; and to the west, Fika Hills and the Kerri-Kerri and Ngizim Plateaus to the Bedde country. The Manga country from the Kano Border to a point near Geidam and from there to Lake Chad, the Komadugu Wobe (Yobe) river closes Bornu to the north as of old.<sup>44</sup>

It is relevant to digress a bit to put the study into proper context. The main aim of colonial rule in history was the imposition of colonial administrative control with minimum cost, and the derivative immense profit in returns, and in most cases exploitative benefits. So also, the British colonial administration in Borno, as part of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria. However, a major handicap of the British colonial administration, after the conquest of Northern Nigeria, was that of insufficient resources to effectively administer the territory. As a result, this led them to adopt the policy of indirect rule,<sup>45</sup> as the “rule by the colonial administration through the existing institution”<sup>46</sup> or rather, it was the “rule through the native chiefs or traditional authorities.”<sup>47</sup> The use of the local traditional personnel served two purposes: one, it bestowed limited legitimacy by association. Secondly, it allowed for the exploitation of local human and material resources at no cost to the British colonizer. It was in this regard, that the colonial administration incorporated the *Chima* system into the administration of British Borno, but with far reaching changes which diluted the original effectiveness of the system: instead of internal cohesion and sustainability, it served the promotion of British colonialism.

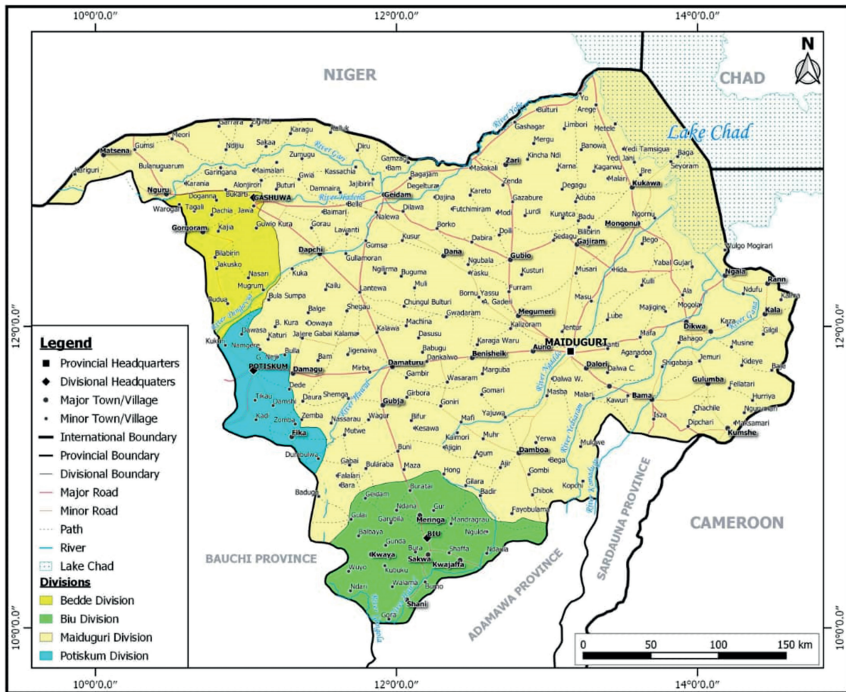
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<sup>44</sup> SNP 7 – 6661/1908 BP – Kanuri Tribe-Laws and Customs Notes on, National Archives Kaduna (NAK), Nigeria.

<sup>45</sup> Adiele Afigbo, “The Establishment of Colonial Rule 1900–1918,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 2, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1974): 435–40.

<sup>46</sup> Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*: 179.

<sup>47</sup> Samuel O. Okafor, *Indirect Rule* (Ikeja: Thomas Nelson, 1981): 5.



**Map 2:** Bornu Province up to 1955. Geography Department, ABU Zaria, 2020.<sup>48</sup>

The principle of “indirect” rule had emerged from the liberalism of the British democratic tradition since 1783. That was the year when Edward Burke in the House of Commons urged the principle of trusteeship in the debate of Fox’s East India Bill.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it tested this imperial administrative system in both India and Fiji, and Lugard adopted it in Northern Nigeria in the early twentieth century.<sup>50</sup> The legal basis for indirect rule was provided by the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1843, which empowered the Crown “to exercise any Jurisdiction which it has, or may come to have, in a foreign country, in an ample a manner as if the jurisdic-

<sup>48</sup> Wulga Bulus Yowomgi, Geography Department, ABU Zaria, 2020 for Abdullahi Garba, a PhD graduate student. Adopted with his permission.

<sup>49</sup> Okafor, *Indirect Rule*: 5–6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*: 2.

tion had been gained by the conquest or cession of territory.”<sup>51</sup> This was concretised by the Berlin Act of 1885, the Brussels and the Foreign Jurisdiction Acts of 1890, which “charged the protecting power with the duty of establishing administrative and judicial institutions in the protected state.”<sup>52</sup> By implication, these acts created both a philosophical and practical legal instrument of the form and manner of control that should be imposed on Borno. A colonial one based on British imperial experience and reality. Specifically, the British colonial administrative policy since 1886 was to federate its West African colonies of the Gambia, Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and Lagos.<sup>53</sup> So also with the conquest of Southern Nigeria, it brought about the adoption of a policy of gradual amalgamation by Sir Ralph Moor of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1896. This led to the appointment of the Niger Committee in 1897 by the British Government, to investigate the question of a suitable form of British administration in her dependencies in West Africa.<sup>54</sup>

However, in the case of the protectorates of Northern Nigeria and Borno, the implementation of the Foreign Jurisdiction Act of 1843 established Abubakar Garbai as the *Shehu* of British Borno in 1902.<sup>77</sup> *Shehu* Abubakar Garbai was mandated to form the Native Administration of Borno Division and Province under the supervision of the British Resident, William P. Hewby.<sup>55</sup> The Native Administration under the *Shehu* was organized into districts under *Ajias* or district heads. From 1905 to 1913, there were eighteen (18) districts. The British provincial administration wanted to reduce the number of districts to save cost, but the *Shehu* favoured increasing them to accommodate as many of his appointees as possible.<sup>56</sup> Under the *Ajias*, there were *Lawans* or “sub-district” heads who supervised the village headmen and ward heads at the village area units as the lowest stratum of the official traditional administra-

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.: 2.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.: 4.

<sup>53</sup> Afigbo, “The Establishment of Colonial Rule 1900–1918”: 435.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.: 439.

<sup>55</sup> SNP 15 – Acc 18 Borno Province, National Archives Kaduna (NAK), Nigeria.

<sup>56</sup> SNP 10 – 282p/1913, SP – AR, 1912 (NAK), *Nigeria*; SNP 10 – 286p/1913 (NAK), *Nigeria*; Ronald Cohen, “The Structure of Kanuri Society” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1960): 195.

tion.<sup>57</sup> Under the *Ajias* employed by the British, the formation of each district under the different fiefdoms was meticulously validated as the basis of demarcation and constitution. This detail of the fiefs and their configuration shows the degree that the British colonial authority had reached to reorganise and transform it into districts. Significantly, it gave us the information of how the fiefdoms had previously been, and the complex form of their ownership as well as how the British in Borno transformed them. It is instructive that the British used the formation of the district heads as a means of changing the old system of taxation by the monarch in Bornu, which the *Shehu* and his feudal lords collected and shared for themselves alone. The new public account system of revenue generation into the Native Authority account replaced the old *Chima* system, in which all public officers, including the *Shehu* and the district heads among others, had fixed monthly salaries from the treasury, known as *Beit-el-mal*.

This new form of colonial economic, social, and political dispensation, with the Native or Emirate Administration in Borno under the *Shehu* controlled by the Resident of Borno Province at the headquarters, Maiduguri, was one of the impacts of indirect rule as a new form of governance. Furthermore, it provided effective control and efficient resource appropriation to the colonial administration in Borno. In addition, the colonial administration economised the cost of running Borno by using the traditional institution, the use of the taxation taken from the society to run the administration at low cost. This use of the traditional political institutions freely allowed for unhindered exploitation of the human and material resources available without any meaningful support for the improvement and sustainability of the system after colonial rule. In general, the successful creation of the Native Authority that imposed British colonial rule in Borno as a foreign derived initiative, had an inherently negative exploitative string that was detrimental to the survival of the system in the aftermath of colonial rule.

Indeed, this observation is derived from the *Chima* system in pre-colonial period as tentatively outlined earlier, its adaptation and incor-

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<sup>57</sup> Adam, *Major Landmarks in the Political History of Dikwa Emirate since 1900*: 245.

poration by the British in the colonial administration of Borno Division as part of Borno Province. This was distinct from what it had been as a community-based socio-economic system for the appropriation and distribution of goods and services under the pre-colonial rulers of Bornu. The district heads or *Ajias* stationed at the new district headquarters instead of the provincial capital, Kukawa or Yerwa, became the new arrowhead of this system. This also encouraged unguided urbanisation with all its consequences in amorphous growth of the new and emergent urban centres as district and divisional headquarters.<sup>58</sup> The *Chima Jilbe*, tribal leaders of the nomads, particularly the Shuwa Arab *Sheikhs* and *Fogus* as well as the Fulani (or Fellata), had direct access to the district heads. Being the owners of large herds of animals, these tribal leaders became directly responsible to the district administration for the payment of the *jangali* or animal tax as of due. It is imperative to note that at the initial stage of colonial rule, the colonial administration accepted tax payment in both cash and kind. As such they had to get the detailed information about those eligible to taxed, and it was from that we got the information that:

The fief holders in the Dikwa area of Borno in the twentieth century includes the Gəmsə area under Ya Gəmsə (the Queen mother), Balge area under Ahmed Gonimi a prominent member of El-Kanemi Council of State in Bornu and at least 524 fiefs under 104 *Chima Kura*, which were all transformed into districts.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Lavers, “Kanem and Borno to 1808”: 201; Ibrahim Maina Waziri, “Urbanisation in Borno Province, 1900–1960” (MA thesis, University of Maiduguri, 1986); Ibrahim Maina Waziri, “Urbanisation, State Formation and Transformation in Central Sudan: A Case Study of Borno in Pre-Colonial Period,” in ed. Abubakar Garba *State, City and Society: Processes of Urbanisation* (Maiduguri: Gaza Press, 2002): 70–79; Ibrahim Maina Waziri, “Urbanisation in Kanem-Borno Empire before the 19th Century,” in *Papers on Nigerian History*, vol. 1, ed. Sa’ad Abubakar (Abuja: Suffa Nigeria, 1996): 102–12; D.S.M. Koroma and I. Maina Waziri, “A Brief History of Yerwa/Maiduguri,” in *Hallmark of Academic Excellence: University of Maiduguri, 1975–2001*, ed. D.S.M. Koroma (Lagos: CSS Press 2004): 42–58.

<sup>59</sup> Adam, *Major Landmarks in the Political History*: 245.

Hence, this was the final climax of the transformation of the *Chima* system into the district heads or *Ajia/Ajiya* administration in Bornu Division of Borno Province in the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria.<sup>60</sup> In transforming the *Chima* System, colonial reports on Bornu Division and Bama District of Bornu Province in Northern Nigeria derived their information from the fiefs left by Rabih, which were reconstituted into the new districts, such as that of *Mai* Gubbo, son of *Mai* Arri including the Yamtage and Tokombere districts, extending south-east into what is now Ngala unit of Yabiri district.<sup>61</sup> Also, the report states that under German rule the old fiefs with their *Chima* at Dikwa continued to exist and the British when they took over Dikwa in 1914 had “about sixteen fiefs of which the principal *Chima* were at Dikwa,” then there “were Kachella Momadu Timindo, Muhamad Kasimi, Kachella Momadu Kurugu and the *Sheikh* of Dikwa himself.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the report states that the fiefs at Bama form the units of three *Kwalme* (Shuwa nomads) hamlets and villages are as follows:

**Table 2:** Bama (headquarters of the *Ajia* and *Lawan*).<sup>63</sup>

S/No	Village/Hamlets						
1–7	Ngorno	Allimeri	Kidari	Mallam Tsillimri	Tsabtsabua	Ngabara-mari	Koro-shiri
8–12	Jaudiri	Shigam	Dumbiwa	Dumbiwa (Kwalme)		Tsabtsabua (Kwalme)	
13.	Kurnawa (Kwalme)						
Mallam Mastari (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>64</sup>							
S/No	Village/Hamlets						
1–6	Bissugua	Fadamari	Mallam Bukarti	Koroshiri	Ngabara-mari	Bula Mastari	

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.: 447.

<sup>61</sup> John B. Welman, Assistant District Officer (A. D. O.) (1926) Bama District, Dikwa Emirate, Bornu Province, *Special Report*, SNP 17 K5742 (NAK), Nigeria, P.15.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.: 16.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.: 18. The tables one to fifteen (1-15) into the three (3) tables now.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.: 19.

7–12	Gumbori	Shehutari	Kachella Moduri Luksimari		Gadan- gari	Kaji- mari	Wuriabari	
13–17	Kariari	Bashari	Wuribari (Kwalme)		Bashari (Kwalme)		Maintari	
Kesa Geltawa (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>65</sup>								
S/No	Village/Hamlets							
1–6	Mala Arriri	Ngorno Kura		Wurgaza		Ngorno Gana	Tole	Bu- karti
7	Wurgaza (Fulani)							
Fageltama, Bulama Momadu Awami was the first <i>Lawan</i> with succession as follows.								
S/No	Village/Hamlets							
1–3	Bulama Momadu Awami		Bulama Boto		Bulama Abachua.			
Chinna (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>66</sup>								
S/No	Villages/Hamlets							
1–8	Fageltama	Sugabara	Dilewa	Alega	Burgurti	Kil- buri	Bo- tori	Zarmari
9–13	Nguron Gaiya			Momadu Kimeri	Mala Ajiri		Biri	Maintari
14–18	Shettimari	Momodu Kimeri		Mala Arriri	Alega (Kwalme)		Kiburi Kwalme)	
19–20	Alega (Fulani)			Mallam Tsagamri (Kwalme)				

<sup>65</sup> Kesa Geltawa founded under *Shehu* Umar by *Lawan* Zege Fada, who migrated from Yare in Konduga district of Bornu Emirate, was genealogically succeeded by *Lawan* Sale, *Lawan* Mallam (d. 1925). Abba Tsillim in 1926 reigned for only ten months and resigned preferring to return to Konduga where he became the district head or *Ajia*. The third son of *Lawan* Sale, Abba Aji, became the *Lawan* in 1926 with one Fulani hamlet and the following villages. Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> *Lawan* Umara appointed in 1923 was formerly Bulama of Dilewa, as was also his father. The first *Lawan* was deposed and reinstated several times since the times of *Shehu* Hashimi and under Rabih. The fief used to belong to Kiari Buna, including an adjusted fief Mala Ajiri, as part of Fageltama unit. Mallam Abachua was the head of Mala Ajiri, he was the son of a *Chima gana* and there were six villages under the new unit Mala Ajiri, three Kwalme and one Fulani hamlet as follows. Ibid.: 21.

**Table 3: Arrimari (headquarters of *Lawan*).<sup>67</sup>**

S/No.	Villages/Hamlets							
1–7	Kariari	Mallam Kodomiri		Garbari	Jegu	Sheri-furi	Ab-baram	Bula Amsa-mibe
8	Bula Tsokwomari							
Dipchari (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>68</sup>								
S/No	Villages/Hamlets							
1–4	Dalla Gumbori		Mairari		Jabe	Mairari		
Nguroseyo (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>69</sup>								
S/No	Village/Hamlets							
1–7	Tobili	Zuru Bul-tuwa	Mairamri	Ladan Tahr		Mai-ramri	Bur-goshe	Dalobe
8–13	Kaje Kainuri		Mai Mallamri	Mallama Ganari		Jungorori		Zara-meri
14–17	Abu Asheri		Agga Munda (Gamergu)			Agga Fellatari (Fulani)		Kaleri
Mallam Kidari (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>70</sup>								
S/No	Villages/Hamlets							
1–7	Bulongo		Mai Mallamri	Burari	Kariari	Burari	Na-sawa	Budumri

<sup>67</sup> Kariari used to be a fief of Muhaman Kasumi and *Lawan* Bura, the nephew of the Bulama of Mallam Kodomiri who succeeded Kachalla Ibrahim, a slave of the present *Sheikh* and *Lawan* since 1906. Only the nucleus of the old fief is used in creating the present new unit. Ibid.: 22.

<sup>68</sup> Dipcha Gana founded Dipchari which became ruined, until Mallam Lawan Aji from Mallam Maja in Gulumba district rebuilt it in 1906. In 1913 the Sultan of Mandara made him *Lawan* of Bulongo and Dipchari, but after the colonial conquest and from the First World War, *Lawan* Aji had his new unit with Dipchari, and other villages as follows: i). Bullama Munzillim, ii). Aji Karimmi, iii). Lawan Aji. Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Nguroseyo, founded by Maidugu Ibrahim the *Kadi* of Bama in 1918 and succeeded by his son *Lawan* Ahmadu. The place was a well populated unit at the centre of the district with villages. This fief was of *Sheikh* of Dikwa, given to Abba Tor in 1917 with one Gamegu and one Fulani hamlet, as the new unit. Ibid.: 23.

<sup>70</sup> *Lawan* Bukr appointed headman in 1920 and he received two villages from Nguroseyo, three villages from Dipchari, four villages from Kariari, a Salamat and a Fulani hamlet as new unit. Ibid.: 24.

8–13	Bulturi	Sherif Bu- karbe	Bula Sadibe		Gujari	Mun- gaire	Bula Bukarbe	
14–17	Ngabarimari	Lawan Dallari			Mallam Fogori		Momadu Jowori	
18–19	Nasawa (Salamat)	Mai Mallamri (Fulani)						
Bararam (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>71</sup>								
S/No	Villages/Hamlets							
1–7	Kjijiwa	Kagelmari	Yebel	Abbari	Baderi	Mai- ramri	Kai- gam- mari	

**Table 4: Biriwa (headquarters of *Lawan*).<sup>72</sup>**

S/No	Villages/Hamlets						
1–4	Isza	Chokolta	Ajata	Shigamigel			
a). Shigaja (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ) & b). Gardawaji: Urga (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>73</sup>							
S/No	Villages/Hamlets						
1–6a)	Alega	Kilburi	Gangawa	Alafa	Dinge	Zula	
1–6b)	Gardawaji	Kagelmari	Fuguri	Dole	Ngabari-mari	Nguzugeni	
Katumbé (4 hamlets) Jabe Unye (5 hamlets) Jameri Leno (6 hamlets) Umm Bursh. <sup>74</sup>							
S/No	Villages/Hamlets						
1–5	Udila (2 hamlets)	1–5	Udila (2 hamlets)	1–5	Udila (2 hamlets)		
6	Dhar-aj-Jimeil (Gamergu)			6.	Dhar-aj-Jimeil (Gamergu)		

<sup>71</sup> Bararam was under Bulama Mustafa as its *Lawan* and when Bama became a district under Abba Tor, two Gamergu hamlets included into the new units. Ibid.: 25.

<sup>72</sup> Diriwa had *Lawan* Kapsur appointed chief of the Gamergu in 1910 by the *Sheikh* of Dikwa, succeeded by his son Maiye after his death in 1925 as the new unit. Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Shigaja and Gardawaji were under *Lawan* Kwoi and Lawan Gajere as a unit. Ibid.: 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> Tabanawa created as a new unit under *Lawan* as-Sadik the head of the Kwalme (Walad Himet) in Bama District, which was uninhabited bush, including the three hamlets of Tabanawa, Sugabara and Tole and Katumbé (headquarters of *Lawan*) under *Lawan* Ma'in the leader of the Bama Salamat had these villages. Ibid.: 26–27.

Udila (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ). <sup>75</sup>			
S/No	Villages/Hamlets		
1–6	Zimbillim (4 hamlets)	Magirta Dal-lari	Jiwa (Gamergu)
Karawaji (headquarters of <i>Lawan</i> ) under <i>Lawan</i> Hamet of Be'i Fulani. <sup>76</sup>			
S/No	Villages/Hamlets		
1–2	Falafala Geltawa	Ajawa (3 hamlets)	

These details of the fiefs, including the distinct types of inhabitants, their occupational as villagers and farmers or nomads, were reported by the colonial authority in forming the districts in the areas.

**Table 5:** Lists of fiefs and *Chima* in Mobber and Kukawa Districts of Bornu Division.<sup>77</sup>

S/No.	Fiefs	<i>Chimas</i>
1.	Jedko (Kercheke)	Shettima Momadu Kanuri
2.	Segaga	Burra Abbanami
3.	Zari	Kabuskema
4.	Bagun	Baguma
5.	Arege}	Kachella Jibirin
6.	Darrige}	Kachaella Yussuf Herellami
7.	Duchi}	

<sup>75</sup> Udila (headquarters of *Lawan*) under *Lawan* Dungushu the head of the Yesiye in Bama District and his unit in the south-east includes his villages and four Gamergu hamlets at Dahr-aj-Jimoil as a unit. Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Karawaji (headquarters of *Lawan*) under *Lawan* Hamet of Be'i Fulani granted a territorial unit, mostly bush land but includes all his own villages as a unit. Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> SNP 10 183P (1919) Bornu Province Special Report on Mobber (NAK), Nigeria: 16.

8.	Damasak}	Mustrema Abdu Nebi
9.	Isufuri}	
10.	Limboram}	
11.	Dimmerwa}	
12.	Kauwa Katagarwa}	
13.	Itugua}	
14.	Fogua	Shettima Abdul Kerim
15.	Gashagar	Agit Abaras
16.	Karelto	Abba Kakami
17.	Zabalum	Abba Mallam
18.	Yawa Kura}	Ya Magira
19.	Yawa Gana}	
20.	Yo}	
21.	Guwati	Ya Gumsu
22.	Ngaribiwa	Mallam Munufi

The \*Ya Magira (Ya *magara* or Queen Mother) and \*Ya Gumsu (Ya *gumsu* or Senior Wife of the *Mai* or *Shehu*) were the two most important female titles of Borno. The twenty-two fiefs in table 5 are situated in the interior riverain of Bornu in the districts made up of small temporary farm settlements, mostly slave settlements of the Kukawa nobility.<sup>78</sup> This area north of the Komadugu Yobe River suffered from Tuareg and Tibbu raids until the British and French colonial administrations established control. The fief holders in Mobber were *Chima Jiribe* (one who oversaw a specific territory) rather than *Chima Chidibe* (one who owned a fief over people).<sup>79</sup> The *Shettima Fogua* and the *Kankama* of Damsak were the two offices in Mobber with the powers of life and death over people in Bornu Emirate. During the reign of *Shehu* Umar in the nineteenth century, the headman of Yo was raised to the position of *Shettima* for escorting caravans through unsettled area such as the Yoma.<sup>80</sup> The Zenua Bula Fatima

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.: 16–17.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.: 17–19.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.: 19.

headman of Ya Gumsu's fief Guwati, had territorial jurisdiction over a large village area, so also was Shettima of Kesa, the head of the Sugurti Kanenbu and the headman of Arege, a group of Bedde (Bade) who had the title of Kullima from the village of Kulli. Villages in Mobber had their headmen elected by the Land Board that found forty-three headmen with equal claims of rulership of Kareto village formed from small "Badduwai" nomadic group of Bornu settlements. Thus, the absorption of the old fiefs in uninhabited areas into the neighbouring headmen territories by the Land Board. As such, the headman of Zari village in the old town of Ngaribiwa controlled three fiefs – Dimmerwa, Ngaribiwa and Zari, the first two of which had been uninhabited for years after the death of Rabih in 1902. Under *Shehu* Lamino/El-Kanaemi, Kachella Here at Duchi defended the western part of Mobber from attacks coming from the northern desert fringes, leading to his appointment as the *Chima* of all the riverain villages from Gashagar to Damasak, while Isufuri or Yussufari was founded later by Kachella Yussuf, a slave settlement with Banna as its headquarters.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, these were also unique information of the configuration of the *Chima* system since the nineteenth century as inherited by the British at the initial period of the imposition of colonial rule in the opening decades of the twentieth century. The four Divisions and Native Emirates under first or second-class chiefs had a Senior Resident as the supervisor of the province since 1914:

**Table 6:** Four Divisions, Native Emirates, and their Chiefs in Bornu Province.<sup>82</sup>

S/No.	Division	Native Emirate	Head Chief	
1.	Bornu	Bornu	<i>Shehu</i> Umar Ibrahim al-Kanemi (First Class)	
2.	Dikwa	Dikwa	<i>Shehu</i> Umar Ibn Muhammad al-Kanemi (First Class)	
3.	Biu	Biu	Amir Ali ibn Amir Garga Babur (Second Class)	
4.	Potiskum	{Bedde {Fika	Amir Suleman ibn Saleh (Second Class) Amir Momodu ibn Idirisa (Second Class).	

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.: 20–21.

<sup>82</sup> SNP 10 260P 1914, Bornu Province (NAK) Nigeria: 8.

**Table 7:** Bornu, Dikwa, Biu, Fika Districts and Bedde under their Emirates/ Native Chiefs.<sup>83</sup>

S/No.	Division	District	Title
i.	Bornu	Auno	Abba
ii.		Borsari	Zenua Wuroma
iii.		Dalori	Abba
iv.		Damaturu	Waziri Putabe
v.		Fune	Zenua Kabuskema
vi.		Gashua	Abba
vii.		Geidama	Kaigamm
viii.		Gubio	Zenua Zantama
xi		Gujba	Abba
x.		Kaga	Ajia
xi.		Kanembu	The Shettima Kanuri
xii.		Konduga	Abba
xiii.		Magumeri	Abagana
xiv.		Margi	Zenua Iyrima
xv.		Marte	Zenua
xvi.		Matsena	Mai
xvii.		Mobber	Zenua Arjinoma
xviii.		Monguno	Abba
xviv.		Nganzei	Abana
xix.		Nguru	Abba

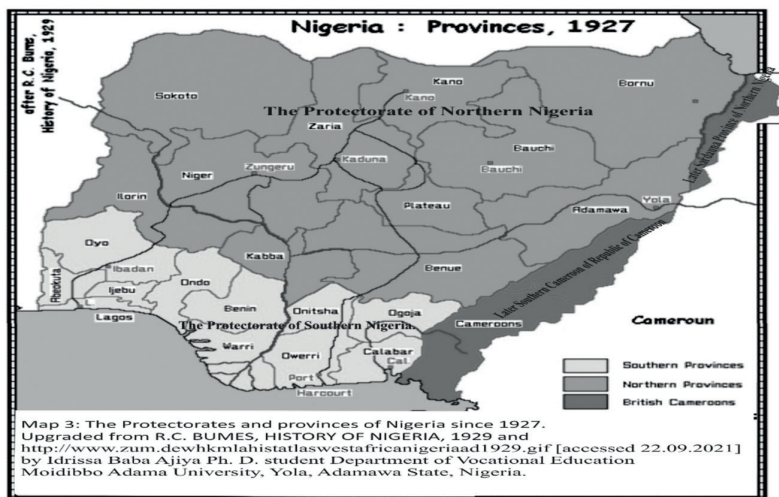
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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.: 8–9.

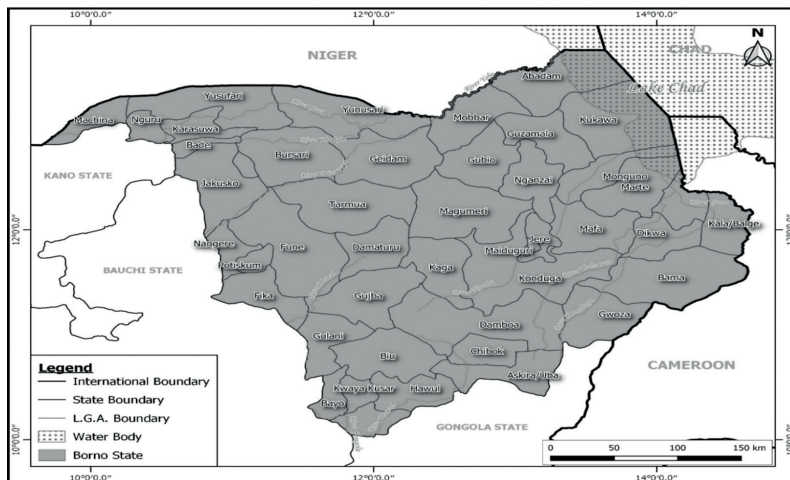
i.	Dikwa	Ashigashiya	Abba
ii.		Dikwa	Abba
iii.		Dure	Zantamma
iv.		Fada	Abba
v.		Gulumba	Abba
vi.		Gumsu	Abba
vii.		Gwoza	Abba
viii.		Jilbe	Yarima
ix.		Ngala	Kaigama
x.		Rann	Abba
xi.		Yabiri	Lawan
xii.		Woloje	Yarima
i.	Biu	Babur	Maina
ii.		Tera	Berde
iii.		Burra West	Maina
iv.		Burra East	Batera
v.		Margi	Mai
vi.		Shani	Mai
i.	Fika	Fika	Lawan
ii.		Potiskum	Lawan

Bornu and Dikwa Divisions were the British and German colonies before the First World War in 1914 and were merged in 1961 after the plebiscite by the United Nations, while Biu and Fika Divisions were independent.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>84</sup> Nsemba Edward Lenshie and Jiebreel Yakubu Gambo, "The United Nations Plebiscites in the Northern Cameroons: Post-Colonial Issues and Challenges in Sardauna Local Government Area of Taraba State, Nigeria," *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences* 4, no. 19 (2014): 10.



**Map 3: The Protectorates and Provinces of Nigeria since 1927.**



**Map 4:** Local Governments in Borno State. Geography Department, ABU Zaria, 2020.<sup>85</sup>

Hence, as shown in this paper and is observable in Map 4, the *Chima* system of pre-colonial Bornu evolved as Native Authority under the British colonial indirect rule administration in the twentieth century. But it is important to note that the transformation of the *Chima* system was only in Borno Division where it existed, while throughout Nigeria there were the establishment of districts from other different forms of traditional administrative set-up unlike the *Chima* system in the other divisions of Borno and other provinces of Nigeria too.

## Conclusion

Therefore, the colonial administrative structure in Borno division and province in Northern Nigeria evolved incorporating the *Chima* system under the High Commissioner as head of the Protectorate, represented by the Resident in the province, who had the District Officer (D.O.) under him as the head of the division in the new main, mostly only European colonial administrators that controlled the whole of the protectorate administration albeit indirectly at the local level through the Emirs and Chiefs. The emirates or native authorities as the traditional administrative structure under the Emirs and Chiefs as their heads, had under their political authority the district head or the *Ajiya*, reflecting the adoption of old the *Chima* system in Borno, into the new system of the colonial Native administration in Borno division – but without ownership or control of the taxes and revenues which were now directly controlled by the public treasury or the *Beit-el-mal*, as one of the major differences between the old and the new administration of Northern Nigeria and the colony of Nigeria since the amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria in 1914.<sup>86</sup> This emerged from the background and ground work of the British when they abolished slavery in 1904 and at the same time promulgated the land ordinance that institutionalised the district heads and village heads with the collection of the land and cattle (or *jangali*) taxes. This established the legal

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.: 451.

basis of the transformed *Chima* system in Borno division as part of the colonial districts, which formed the basis that established the districts as foundation of the later transformation Local Government Administration of Nigeria.<sup>87</sup> The districts created in Borno and other parts of Nigeria, starting from the colonial to the post-colonial periods (i.e., 1900/1904 to 1960 and afterwards), particularly after the creation of states following the military coups from 1966, led to the splitting into two states former Borno state (synonymous with former province) into the current Borno and Yobe states on 27th August 1991,<sup>88</sup> with twenty-seven (27) and seventeen (17) Local Government Areas for the former and the latter respectively (see appendix).

At this juncture, it is important to point out that this study looked at the evolution of the *Chima* system, its operation and function in the history of Borno at least in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Where the data used were from these periods by virtue of the colonial documentation and records that established both the qualitative and quantitative nature of the *Chima* system in the process of its adaptation into indirect rule. It also espouses the colonial authority's method of imposing colonial rule, particularly by adapting pre-colonial institutions and structures to enhance colonisation. The data provides a basis for further research in this area or similar research topics as it requires further specialised investigations into other aspects of the impact colonial rule and the changes it brought on the society. Such as also on the traditional institutions, sustainable local community participation in governance, which was bequeathed to the present local governments by the colonial administration as inherited by independent Nigerian state to date. These problems associated with the autonomy of the local administration persisted even when constitutional provision separated the three tiers of governments in Nigeria into the Federal, States and Local governments.

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<sup>87</sup> O. Oluwatobi Adeyemi, "The Politics of States and Local Governments Creation in Nigeria: An Appraisal," *European Journal of Sustainable Development* 2, no. 3 (2013): 156–57 and 167, DOI: 10.14207/ejsd.2013.v2n3p155; <https://infoguidenigeria.com/functions-local-government-nigeria/> [accessed 25.09.2021].

<sup>88</sup> For the details of state creation in Nigeria, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States\\_of\\_NigeriaandFederalCapitalTerritory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/States_of_NigeriaandFederalCapitalTerritory) [accessed 02.07.2022].

Thus, the state administrations undermining the local governments, as major drawback to efficient and effective grassroot administration and development. In fact, it retarded and scuttled the emergence and workings of the local administration in Nigeria in general. Indeed, the districts created in the colonial era formed the base of the subsequent reformation of the local governments in modern independent Nigeria, which worked for the colonial administration but not so since independence, during the periods of both military rule and the much-expected good governance from the democratic rule in Nigeria at least from latest current democratic experience from 1999.

It is therefore not out of place to state that the current problems with local government administration are partly explained by the colonial legacy in the way the *Chima* system has been changed under the “indirect rule” (neglecting the aspect of equitable distribution of goods and services within the community, using the system to exploit the human and natural resources). The consequences for the various sectors (seemingly neglected or not sustainably incorporated like education, health, agriculture, security, etc.) urgently need to be addressed to come to grips with these problems. The essay aims to contribute to this assessment as a means of highlighting this important gaps in aspects of Nigerian development. Also, the socio-economic and political consequences on the political culture of Borno and Nigeria, still awaits a thorough analyses to unbundle its impact on the performance of the local administration in modern Nigeria.

Appendix: Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Borno and Yobe State.

	<b>Borno State LGAs</b>	<b>Yobe State LGAs</b>
1.	Abadam	Bade
2.	Askira/Uba	Bursari
3.	Bama	Damaturu
4.	Bayo	Fika
5.	Biu	Fune
6.	Chibok	Geidam
7.	Damboa	Gujba
8.	Dikwa	Gulani
9.	Gubio	Jakusko
10.	Guzamala	Karasuwa
11.	Gwoza	Machina
12.	Hawul	Nangere
13.	Jere	Nguru
14.	Kaga	Potiskum
15.	Kala/Balge	Tarmuwa
16.	Konduga	Yunusari
17.	Kukawa	Yusufari
18.	Kwaya Kusar	
19.	Mafa	
20.	Magumeri	
21.	Maiduguri	
22.	Marte	
23.	Mobbar	
24.	Monguno	
25.	Ngala	
26.	Nganzai	
27.	Shani	

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Rainer Kuhl  
Jägerstraße 47  
13595 Berlin

Tel.: 00 49 30 68 97 72 33  
Fax: 00 49 30 91 60 77 74  
E-Mail: [post@ebverlag.de](mailto:post@ebverlag.de)

The *Chima* system under the *Mai* – ruler of Kanem-Borno (the longest-lasting pre-colonial African state) – is a fiefdom based on control of human and material resources. This form of the state governance had the *Chima Kura* or lords (senior *Chima*) and their subordinates or *Chima Gana* (junior local representatives) administering the state under the *Mai*. The study of how the *Chima* system was transformed under British colonial administration – the “indirect rule” or the *Ajiya* or district head system – in Borno Province shows its incorporation as Native Authority, a unique form of indirect rule. It evolved as the local government administration in Borno and Nigeria after 1960, thereby adapting the pre-colonial *Chima* system into a colonial and post-colonial administrative system in Borno, Nigeria.

## THE AUTHOR

Professor Ibrahim Maina Waziri has been Professor in the Department of History at the University of Maiduguri since October 2007. He was an Alexander von Humboldt/George Forster Fellow at the University of Bayreuth from July 2004 to December 2005. Professor Maina Waziri was head of the History Department, University of Maiduguri (2000 to 2014), Coordinator of the History Department at Federal University Gashua, Yobe State (2015), Pioneer Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences at Federal University Gashua (March to November 2015, on Sabbatical), and Director of the Centre for Trans-Saharan Studies (April 2018 to February 2022). Currently Waziri is a professor of social and economic history at University of Maiduguri. He attended over forty conferences at national and international fora, and currently has over thirty publications in books, journals, and proceedings.