

An Evaluation of the Origin, Structure, and Impact of the Defunct Pankshin Division on the Traditional Political Dynamics of Ngas Ethnic Group

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Abstract

This investigation delves into the historical context of Nigerian colonialism, focusing specifically on the establishment of the now-defunct Pankshin Division. The study scrutinizes the mechanisms employed by the British administration, particularly the Native Administration, and assesses its influence on the traditional political system of the Ngas people. The chosen methodology for this academic inquiry is the Historical Method, deemed most suitable for the nature of this research. Central to the study are the well-defined concepts of Native Authority and Traditional Political System. The ultimate conclusion drawn is that the Ngas political framework underwent significant disruption and restructuring by the British, primarily through the introduction of the Native Authority. This transformative action laid the groundwork for certain chieftaincy roles and boundary disputes that persistently afflict Ngas Land to this day.

Keywords: Native authority, traditional political system, Pankshin division, ethnic group

Introduction

The success of the Indirect Rule System in most of what is Northern Nigeria that was under the Caliphate system established by Dan Fodio gave rise to a single narrative that the Indirect Rule System was successful in the Northern part of Nigeria forgetting the distortion it created in the Political Systems of non-centralized states within the North. So the tendency for scholars to gloss over the impact of the introduction of Native Authority in decentralized States like those of the Ngas people in Northern Nigeria is real thus the need for an essay on Colonial Administrative Units like the Defunct Pankshin.

Traditional societies such as those of the Ngas were not homogenous. Every cluster

of Ngas settlements had its traditional political system and were notably independent except for settlements that were an offshoot of other earlier settlements therefore the need to maintain the political system of the older settlement. These clusters of villages were, however, connected by clan lineage, language, trade, intermarriages, and traditional religious ceremonies like rites of passage and would rally around each other during attacks by foreign groups that were not Ngas. British rule through the Native Authority Ordinance was to change all that. The people found themselves in uncharted waters.

In view of the above, the Traditional Political System of the Ngas people was altered in the process of organizing the people into units that could easily be govern

and taxed effectively by the British. New boundaries were delineated for administrative convenience. Even clans that do not see eye to eye were bulldozed and harassed into the same administrative units. Little wonder, this arrangement formed the bedrock or foundation of most of the intractable chieftaincy and boundary crises prevalent among the Ngas people that this academic paper is trying to highlight.

Methodology

On a general note, the Historical Method was used for this research work. This method is known to be narrative and descriptive. Oral interviews were conducted. Good use of Primary Source material on the internet like the Endangered Archives Programme which sought to preserve cultural heritage and make it available to as wide an audience as possible was quite handy. A trove of information on the colonial rule in Nigeria was already available on the net and secondary materials like books, journals, and video documentaries of colonialism were analyzed and sieved through for data.

Definition of Concepts

Native Authority

To consolidate their Authority the British introduced the Native Ordinance of 1947 which was replaced by the Native Ordinance of 1955. The Ordinance of 1955 defined native Authority as any Chief or other African or any Council or group appointed to be Native Authority for a particular area. This definition is all-encompassing as it leaves room for any person deemed fit by

the Colonialist to be appointed to the Native Authority. From the originator of the system itself as captured by Cowan

The general meaning of the term, as it was expounded by the first governor of Northern Nigeria, Sir Frederick (later Lord) Lugard, was clear and precise. It was only in its later application in the whole of Nigeria that it became clouded over by the mystique that grew up about it. Lugard stated his native policy succinctly in his first annual report for 1900: The Government utilizes and works through native chiefs and avails itself of the intelligence and powers of governing the Fulanicaste in particular but insists up on their observance of the fundamental laws of humanity and justice. If an Emir proves nameable to persuasion and threats ... he is deposed and in each case, a Fulani or others successor recognized by the people has been installed in his place.¹

This intention by Lugard worked perfectly for the Emirates in Northern Nigeria which had well-defined boundaries and jurisdictions but its application was however complex in the Non-Centralized States of Nigeria of which the Ngas villages were a part.

¹ Cowan, L. Gray. "I. The Native Authority System in Nigeria" In *Local Government in West Africa*, 12-34. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 1958. <https://doi.org/10.7312/cowa91850-003>

Traditional Political System

Even though perceptions may vary as to what a traditional political system is, generalization can be made thus, it is one that evolved with a society, developed by the society over time to administer and regulate the society. In some cases, it does not change while in some it is seen as dynamic. So it is part and parcel of the historical development of a given society. For the Ngas people, such powers reside in the village head and their traditional religion.

Aside from the provision of law and order, the traditional political system aims at safeguarding the customs and traditions of the people and effectively managing conflicts emanating from the people.² However, most of these systems were dislodged or reshaped by the Colonialists to suit their mission of domination and exploitation. Opeyemi captured the bastardization of African institutions when he wrote:

Before the intrusion of colonialism, Black Africa had survived in its societies many kinds of government. Colonialism, a sort of multi-faced revolution, disrupted the African

civilization. It started to dislodge the traditional technology of indigenous Africa. It disrupted the traditional economic order and rent asunder the traditional social system. By the very token of that socio-economic change, the traditional political systems were easily submerged by the European imperial authorities. Nationalism, which was by no means nativism, continued the revolution of the colonial regimes with more vigor because it was dissatisfied with both the traditional and the colonial orders.³

Advent of Colonialism in Ngas Land

The year 1900 saw the declaration of a Protectorate over what is now Northern Nigeria by Fredrick Lord Lugard. He was reported to have wasted no time in dispatching executive messages to Emirs and rulers of the north about the new order and they were required to acknowledge British sovereignty by way of tax payment which many, including some of the Ngas villages, refused to oblige him.⁴ This was met with expeditions across the North to pacify the non-compliant rulers and their people. The Ngas people, particularly, those of the Hills were among those that needed to be pacified. These so-called expeditions

² Research Clue. (2020). traditional political system and the development of democracy in Nigeria. A study of Lagos state 2010-2019. Available at: <https://nairaproject.com/projects/5242-traditional-political-system-and-the-development-of-democracy-in-nigeria-a-study-of-lagos-state-2010-2019.html>. [Accessed: 2023-11-18].

³ OLA, Opeyemi. "Traditional Political Systems In a Modernizing Nigeria." *PréSence Africaine*, no. 96 (1975): 641-692. Accessed November 18, 2023. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24350087>

⁴ Gwimbe, History of Colonial Domination in Yil Ngas and its Ecoclines AD 1902-1952: Roots of Rural Poverty Examined, 40

were to set in motion the mechanism for the formal control of Ngas Land and other areas that were to be drafted to form the Pankshin Division. The incursion into Ngas land was through Bauchi Emirate after it was taken over by the British in 1902. Bauchi was said to be quickly overrun by the British force. However, there was an attempt at a revolt by one Satiru, a fanatical Islamic preacher, who speculated the advent of a Mahdi that was coming to liberate the people.⁵ Charles Temple, the Resident appointed for Bauchi, learned about the Ngas people while on tour. It was probably from what he knew about the Ngas that Captain Foulkes, who appointed Assistant Resident of Bauchi in charge of the Kanna Division of Bauchi in 1906 was instructed to enlarge the newly created Kanna Division to include Ngas land and Mwaghavul land,⁶ thus the birth of Pankshin as a Division. It is instructive not to say that by 1906 part of Jos was administered as part of Bauchi Division and the rest of Plateau as a Sub-Division under Bauchi with Headquarter in Bukuru.⁷

By 1908, virtually most of Ngas Land had been taken over by the invading British

forces except for some pockets of village areas. What was left was how these areas would be administered. According to Gueye and Boehen

In all the newly acquired colonies, the objectives outlined here were pursued and the methods were applied. District commissioners and traveling commissioners were appointed, new courts were established, new codes and new laws were introduced, chiefs were confirmed or deposed and new ones appointed, direct and indirect taxation was introduced, and forced labor was demanded for the construction of roads and railways. All these measures naturally generated various reactions.⁸

The invading forces were faced with a large and unfamiliar territory of Northern Nigeria to govern. Furthermore, there was a shortage of manpower and funds. The British realized that the suggestion of direct control was out of the question. Lord Lugard was to imbibe the use of existing indigenous institutions as the best method of colonial administration in the backdrop that he introduced the Indirect Rule system rooted in the principle of native administration, the idea of a dual mandate. Based on his analysis of the relatively low-cost requirement of running an Indirect Rule Policy, Lugard favoured, as a general policy,

⁵Lugard, Fredrick Lord. *Colonial Report Number 516*. Annual, London: Darling and Sons, 1905-1906.

⁶ Gwimbe, History of Colonial Domination in Yil Ngas and its Ecoclines AD 1902-1952: Roots of Rural Poverty Examined, 41

⁷Ames, C. G. *Gazetteer of The Plateau Province, Nigeria*. London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1972, 22

⁸UNESCO. *General History of Africa VII: Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*. California: University Press California, 1985, 316

the adoption and replication of the Emirate system as a model for the entire Northern Nigeria, and later on for the whole country.⁹

The groundwork for the colonial reorganization of the Ngas to warrant the creation of a Colonial Division in defunct Northern Nigeria was done by CPT H. D Foulkes. He was known to be the first Colonial Officer to have toured Ngas Land on the instruction of Howard, the Acting Resident at Bauchi. He submitted an anthropological assessment of the “Angass” people to the Colonial Resident at Bauchi, forming the basis for a decision that upgraded the so-called “Angass Districts” into a Division.¹⁰

A Glimpse at the Ngas Traditional Political System before the Coming of the Colonial Administration.

Traditionally and historically, the Ngas lived in clusters made up of villages that were autonomous and also clannish. These villages were independent from each other, politically and otherwise. They were only connected by a nexus of clan relationships, intermarriages, and religious ceremonies villages observed together. For any village unit in Ngas land, the evolution of governance is largely traced to the first family or clan to settle in an area. Scholars of Ngas history and culture seem to be

unanimous in their submission that Ngas people moved or migrated to their present habitat in waves of clans or families. Leaders of such families or clans led these movements. The first family or clan to settle in an area automatically becomes the ruling family. Other families or clans that will come after the ruling family will be given political positions or titles based on the time of arrival. However, there are exceptional cases where some families, who preceded the ruling families of their villages are not among the ruling families of their villages. This might be so because, in some cases, some of the migrating clans may have arrived with their political structure which subsumed the one already established by the first family or clan to arrive. In the event of two or more families or clans arriving at the same time, age and trustworthiness may come into play in the selection of who to become the *Ngolong*.¹¹ The heads of these families or clans, are known as *Ngopolu*.¹² It is instructive to note that this title, aside from that of the Chief or King, later assumed Hausa names because of the advent of British Colonialists who modeled the Native Authority they created after the Fulani Emirate system.

A classic example of an evolution of a traditional political setup in Ngas Land in recent times is that of Lugor Village in Pankshin. The village and its political system evolved within the 20th century,

⁹Gofwen, rotgak. *The History and Socio-Political Organization of the Ngas*. Lagos: St. Stephen Bookhouse Inc., 2007, 83

¹⁰ Ibid, 85

¹¹(Gonet 2013)

¹²*Ngopolu* literally translated, it means the owner of the door in Ngas language. However, it means a leader of a clan or a large family in Ngas land, especially in

around 1908 to be précised. The first people to set up the village were two brothers (Dewan and Dyiwarang) of the Godyis clan who were displaced alongside their relatives at Manung Hill. The two brothers were descendants of the *Godyis* clan that inhabited Manung Hill before the advent of colonialism but were dispersed when the Hill was made the administrative Headquarters of the Defunct Pankshin Division.¹³ They and their descendants established Lugor Village and were the first to settle there, therefore, they and their descendants automatically constituted the ruling family.¹⁴ The next clan to join the Godyis in Lugor is the *Gonchor*, followed by the *Gofwen* Clan, then the *Gongu*, *Lanang*, and *Gongyi* clans in that order. The *Ngopolu* of the three clans that came after the *Go'is* clan constituted the major king-making council therefore they have the Hausa equivalent titles of *Galadima*, *Chiroma*, and *Madaki*. They are the nucleus or members of the inner caucus. The *Ngopolu* of the clans that came in later were made members of the Village Council. This setting with Hausa titles is a common feature in most of the Ngas villages at the moment.

All said and done, the basis for all political positions in Ngas Land is rooted in the traditional religion of the Ngas people. All

the rituals and trappings of the political power are justified or made relevant by the traditional religion or the predominant *kum* of the Ngas people and they are virtually the same in all Ngas society with some little differences and peculiarities. Selection, Coronation (*soupkop*), and burial rites of *Ngolong* are virtually the same in Ngas Land and all are rooted in the traditional religion of the people.

Creation of the Pankshin Division

After the conquest of the Bauchi Emirate in 1902, it became obvious that it was just a matter of time before the independent communities that were within the proximity of the Bauchi Emirate would be taken over by the British. More so, the British erroneously considered all these independent communities as subjects of the Bauchi Emirate. Aside from Dawaki (Pwel), Kabwir, and Amper, all other pre-colonial Ngas societies were independent and fiercely so. By 1908, virtually all of Ngas land had capitulated to the British unjustified onslaught. What was left was the governance of those areas or the Ngas Districts as coined by the British. The task of administering Ngas Districts felt on the shoulders of the newly appointed Assistant Resident, Captain Foulkes. The Ngas Districts fell under the jurisdiction of the newly created Kanna (Kanam) District. The seat of Administration was moved from Kanam District to Wokkos in present-day Pankshin and finally to the Manung Hills in the present Pankshin District for conducive weather and strategic purposes.

¹³ Interview, GotengWullang, 79 c, Mai

Ungwan Manung, April 14, 2019

¹⁴ Interview, Village Head of Lugor Nde Golupwi Jidim, 53, Lugor, February 3, 2019

Impact of colonial administration of Pankshin division of the Ngas traditional political system

The reorganization in 1926 saw the Pankshin Division being made a component of the newly created Jos Province.¹⁵ The Jos Division was carved out of Bauchi Province. The reorganization was to impact the Traditional Political system of the indigenous peoples that were made a component of the Province. Gofwen referred to the exercise as “political landscaping”.¹⁶ The groundwork that formed the bedrock for the political reorganization was the ethnography of the Ngas people done by C G Ames and anthropological notes by Captain Foulkes, the first Colonial Officer to traverse Ngas land extensively. Below are some of the far-reaching impacts of the reorganization.

a. Centralization of the Ngas political system

The introduction of the Native Authority supplanted and suppressed whatever initial traditional political system the Ngas people had. As noted earlier, the Ngas people, like most people of Central Nigeria, lacked any form of centrality as most

of them were independent. The Hill Ngas were said to be very difficult reticent and highly suspicious of any form of foreign administration. Each village unit lived independently of the other. However, the introduction of the Native Authority changed all that. The British harassed and bulldozed small independent Ngas village units into a central authority after brutal conquest despite their non-centrality and political segmentation. Village units were organized into colonial districts that formed the bedrock of the Pankshin Division Native Authority. It was not difficult to achieve this for the plain Ngas villages. This could be attributed to the tutelage that some of the plain Ngas villages were placed under in the Bauchi Emirate. The Plain Ngas villages were grouped into three districts namely Kabwir, Amper, and Gyangyang thereby eroding the independence of the village heads therein.¹⁷ The basis for grouping this village was chiefly because the people spoke the same dialect and had smaller villages or clan settlements that seemed dependent on them.

In the case of the Hill Ngas, grouping them into districts was

¹⁵ A H M Kirk-Greene, C G Ames, eds., *Gazetteers of the Northern Province of Nigeria Volume IV: The Highland Chieftaincies* (London: Frank Cass and Company 1972), 7

¹⁶ Rotgak Gofwen, *The History and Socio-Political Organization of the Ngas: An Anecdotal Compendium of Anthropological Notes*(Lagos: St Stephen Book House Inc, 2007), 9

¹⁷Gofwen, Rotgak. *The History and Socio-Political Organization of the Ngas: An Anecdotal Compendium of Anrhropological Note*. Lagos: St. Stephen BookHouse Inc, 2007, 99

quite difficult. Apart from the fact that the villages found on the hill were fiercely independent, some do not even speak the Ngas language because they had stayed in their habitat for a long and have developed languages that are distinct from the Ngas language. Examples are the Tal Tambes, Fier, Mupun, etc. As Ames rightly noted

“ most of the tribes of this unit opposed the forces of Government on their first arrival in their Districts and there have since then been repeated outbreaks of lawlessness. Several of the districts have remained unsettled within the scope of the Unsettled Districts Ordinance until comparatively recent times”.¹⁸

The Hill Ngas were grouped into five Districts namely, Ampang, Wokkos, Pankshin, and Garram, and the non-Ngas speaking villages were grouped in what the British called Federation.

b. Prominence to people hitherto considered unimportant in traditional Ngas society

There is an ongoing debate as to whether the Native Authorities' link

with the colonial governments in the British African dependencies caused their authority to become weakened and for educated “new men” to emerge as community leaders, or whether the new status and administrative and judicial powers given to them by those administrations allowed chiefs to shake-off the pre-colonial restrictions on their powers and become more authoritarian and even despotic. Setting up a hierarchy of tribal paramount chiefs, subordinate chiefs, and village headmen may also have served to fix previously less rigid “tribal” identities.¹⁹ Quite several people got preeminence in Ngas Land by their association or collaboration with the British Colonialists. A case in point is that of Langkuk Gitik, a ruler of Ner Village in Pankshin who rose to prominence and was given a Class Status as Chief in Ngas Land by the British.

c. The influx of Hausa-type titles and offices

From the Hausa adage ‘ *Angas aska daya Magana daya*, ’²⁰the Ngas have had contact with the Hausa people

¹⁸C G Ames. *Gazetteers of the Northern Province of Nigeria Volume IV: The Highland Chiefs*. London: Frank Cass and Company, 1972, 147

¹⁹McCRACKEN, JOHN. *A History of Malawi: 1859-1966*. Boydell & Brewer, 2012.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt1x71q0>.

²⁰It literary means ‘Ngas man, one tribal mark, one word’. A way of saying that the Ngas people are known not o mince words

long before the advent of colonialism in Nigeria. However, the details and nature of such contacts are sketchy so it is difficult to actually trace the time the Ngas people started using Hausa titles. The usage of Hausa titles, however, became prevalent with the imposition of Native Authority on the Ngas people. The influx of Hausa people into Ngas Land was associated with the coming of the British. They were the crux of the British Colonial Army that conquered and pacified Ngas Land. They also served as porters. The colonial Resident Officer in Bauchi appointed *Ajiyas*²¹ for tax collection in most of Plain Ngas Villages. In Pankshin, they were settled at the foot of Manung Hill and were a major feature in the development of the town. Hausa titles like Galadima, Ciroma, Madaki, Wakili, etc, were introduced into the Ngas Traditional Political System. Ngas began to fit these titles to suit the village administrative setting.

d. Alteration of boundaries and jurisdiction

Village Heads with small populations and land masses that were hitherto independent were subsumed into larger village units for administrative convenience and taxation. The boundaries that were created as a result of the British grouping of Ngas villages for administrative and tax purposes

formed the basis of the boundaries of districts as we have them presently and the district heads as it were are a colonial creation. This informs some of the pockets of boundary and chieftaincy conflicts that are still prevalent in Ngas Land.

Conclusion

The repercussions of the British Administration in Ngas Land surpass any potential benefits, leaving a legacy of significant challenges and complications. In addressing its administrative needs it created problems by tampering with long-established institutions, at times, with brute force. Many boundaries were adjusted and ancient traditional political institutions restructured to accommodate the Native Authority. Traditional Authority and succession to Traditional Authority in Ngas Land are subject to contestations owing to the landscaping by the British.

Furthermore, it is common knowledge that most of the crisis bedevilling traditional political system amongst the Ngas people are also as a result of twisted narrative to reflect present political reality. The findings of this academic paper cannot be overemphasized as it lays bare one of the major root causes of the present predicament of our traditional institutions. If the findings are taken into consideration that will be a big step towards understanding the issues in contention and proffering concrete solutions.

The study, like similar ones on colonialism in Nigeria, provides a springboard for further research work on the

²¹It is a Hausa word for an Ambassador.

positive/negative legacies of colonialism on the non-centralized States in Central Nigeria particularly on the cultural and traditional political system of the people.

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List of Interviews

1	Nde Bala Bakshaka	67	Dene II, Pankshin	16/4/2019	Village Head
2	Nde Golupwi Jidim	52	Lugor, Pankshin	3/2/2019	Village Head, Lugor

Archival Materials

Endangered Archives Programme

1. EAP5/32/1/26/16
2. EAP5/32/1/16/16

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