

**RETHINKING THE EFFECTS OF THE FOREIGN MISSIONARIES'  
MISSION TO AFRICA, FOCUSING ON THE CHURCH OF THE  
BRETHREN MISSIONARIES AMONG THE MARGI UDZIRNGU IN  
NORTHERN NIGERIA**

BY

C2009

Emmanuel Awidau Birdling

Submitted to the Department of International Studies and  
the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Garth Andrew Myers, Committee Chair

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Shawn Leigh Alexander, Committee Member

---

Lacy Michelle Johnson, Committee Member

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Emmanuel Mdurvwa, Committee Member

The Thesis Committee for Emmanuel Awidau Birdling certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following thesis:

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TO AFRICA, FOCUSING ON THE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN  
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Garth Andrew Myers, Committee  
Chair

---

Shawn Leigh Alexander, Committee  
Member

---

Lacy Michelle Johnson Committee  
Member

---

Emmanuel Mdurvwa, Committee  
Member

## **Abstract**

The Margi ethnic group occupies the geographical region of southern Borno and northern Adamawa states of the Republic of Nigeria. This study concentrates on the Margi Udzirngu subgroup who currently resides in North Eastern Nigeria. Margi Udzirngu literally means “*the Margi who reside near the mountain,*” referring to the Mandara Mountains. The Margi Udzirngu resisted external influence and remained impervious to the influence of both Islamic and Christian religion prior to the coming of the Church of the Brethren missionaries in 1948. The primary objective of this research is to understand how the Margi Udzirngu’s ethnic identity was transformed as a result of their contact with the Christian religion, and how they in turn used religion as a medium of transformation to the western notion of modernity marking a period of extensive cultural, economic, and political change.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to all Margi People wherever they are.

And

To the following childhood friends who did not live to start or finish primary school,  
but have lived in my memory all these years.

Zamman Awidau

Zamdayu Angaranyi

Aghalakwa Margimari

Chinampi Sinamai

## **Acknowledgment**

It would not have been possible to write this thesis without the help and support of the kind people around me, only some of whom is it possible to give particular mention. Above all, I would like to thank my family for giving me their unequivocal support throughout.

After spending almost two years in Lawrence and missing two semesters of school, I was literally at unlighted cross roads. I did not know where to go or what to do or even where I was when a man named Garth Andrew Myers showed up with a flash light. He said, “Come, let’s go this way.” As he and I went down the road, I came to know him as Professor Myers; my advisor, mentor, and director at work, and above all else my friend. It has been two and a half years now, I once again, would like to acknowledge and extend my heartfelt gratitude to him for his support and encouragement which has made the completion of this project possible

I also want to thank Dr. Christine Jensen Sundstrom who reintegrated me into academic writing after I had spent several years out of school working in technical field; Dr. Lacy Michelle Johnson whose unparalleled editing and tutorial skill was of immense help to me, I could not have completed on time without her advice; Dr. Shawn Leigh Alexander who agreed to be on my committee despite short notice and gave me valuable advice on the concept of Dubois’s “Double Consciousness.”

I also give a special thank to Dr. Emmanuel Mdurwa, Mr. John Wajilda, Dr. Walia Haman, and Mr. Bello Pur for taking the time to edit and critique the accuracy of my thinking about the Margi Udzirngu culture, and the activities of the missionaries. They are all Margi Udzirngu like me, and I believe, know more about this culture than I do. All are authors in their own right and all went to the missionary school that I attended.

Lastly, but not the least, my gratitude goes to Virginia Ratzlaff; though not much older than me, I consider her my American mother. An accomplished lawyer, at the last minute she agreed to spend hours with me going through the details and editing this work.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction and background**

#### *Overview*

I am a Margi man. I write about the journey of my people, the Margi Udzirngu, covering the period beginning in the year 1948, when the first Church of the Brethren missionaries arrived and settled among us, to the present day.

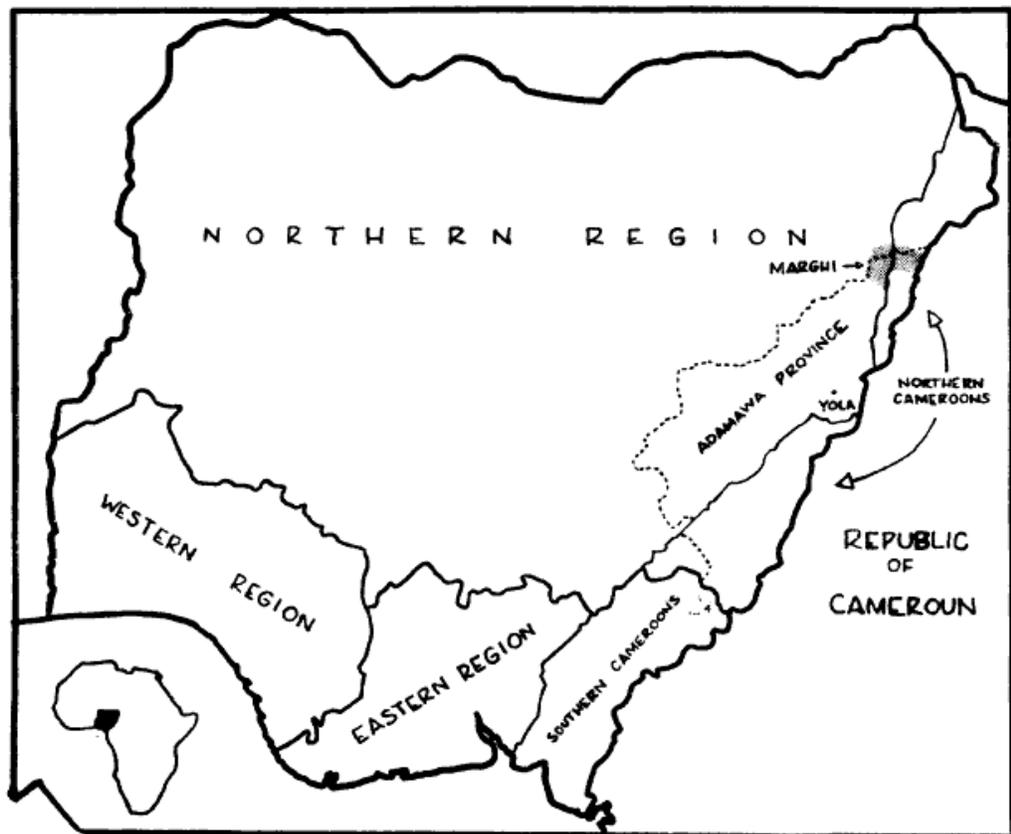
My journey started in 1962, which is when I started to vividly remember the hills and the valleys my people went through on their way to enlightenment at the expense of de-Margi-nization.<sup>1</sup> Others call it modernization or globalization. I write from the perspective of a Margi descendant, because I grew up in the neighborhood at the center of this human drama, a quarter of a mile from the missionary residence, in a typical Margi household.

I am the first of my grandfather's direct descendants to sit in a classroom at the missionary school where I spent time absorbing the missionaries' ideas, just as I continued to do with my peoples' way of life in my father's compound and around the village. As such I draw extensively from the formative years I spent growing up around the missionaries as well as my fathers and grandfathers who at that time did not have time for what the missionaries stood for, but who are now native missionary school teachers; my mothers and grandmothers who had sympathetic ears to the missionaries' message; and the general confusion of dealing with the intrusion and

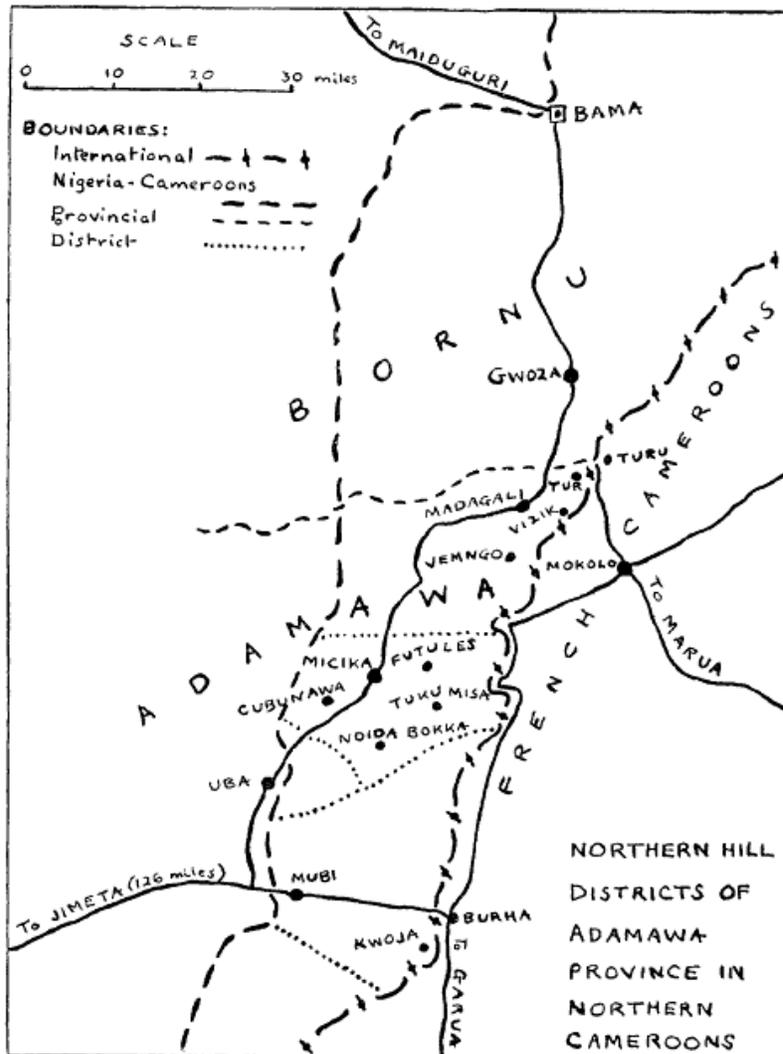
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<sup>1</sup> "De-Margi-nization" is a term I created for taking away from the Margi the culture that made them the Margi people.

acceptance of a new religion, new medicine, and a new culture that came with the American missionaries from the Church of the Brethren.



Map of Nigeria showing the general area of the Margi Udzirngu taken from Vaughn, James H., Jr. (Oct. 1964), p.1078-1095.



Map of the Margi Udzirngu area from AHM KIRK-GREENE-Africa, 1028, p.369-379.

This study uses a qualitative ethnographic approach, using interviews with the members of this culture and my personal observations when living among the Margi Udzirngu people. The specific method that will be used in this case is the emic perspective (see G. David Garson 2006, 2008). The participant observer not only sees what is happening but feels what is like to be part of the group. I will then use my experience to explain how the Margi Udzirngu have viewed the religious, social, political, and cultural changes that resulted from the presence of the white American

missionaries who came and settled among them, and the Margi responses to the challenges of Christianization. Also, most importantly, I will ask how the missionaries viewed the Margi Udzirngu, whom they came to help. Thus, this thesis is highly interdisciplinary and draws upon literature in anthropology, geography, global politics, and the writings of colonial officers.

In view of this I rely on the writings that recount forceful expeditionary activities and writings by travelers, anthropologists, diplomats, and the reflections of American missionaries about their endeavors to educate the Margi and non-Margi. I will examine the cultural and the social environment created by these western sojourners in Margi Udzirngu villages, as well as the contestation over the interrelated issues of morality, sexuality, religion, economics, and local politics that was generated by the arrival of the American missionaries.

This study places the Margi Udzirngu within the broader outlines of African social, religious, and expansionist history. It offers a distinctly new interpretation of social change, a change which started with African school children picking up ideas at the white missionary school and at the Church. The school children began transmitting their newly acquired ideas to their mothers while sitting around the cooking fire in the evenings. The women responded by joining their children in the church on Sundays or at Bible study at the missionary residence on the local market days. This resulted in an emerging change in patterns of behavior and in the relations, structure, and instruction of the Margi Udzirngu ethnic community. These changes

culminated in a rebellion against the Margi's established societal system and defiance against culturally inherited values.

I chose this topic because all other documentation of the mission schools has leaned towards gratitude to the Church of the Brethren, as if to say, "Thanks for coming to civilize us." However, looking critically at this relationship, especially at what the missionaries tell the home church through their letters, can reveal what the missionaries, in part, thought of their new neighbors. There are a few inconsistencies between what has been written, what I heard from my elders, and what I observed and personally experienced when growing up in this part of the world. In the future, I would like to write my dissertation on how the living space of the Margi Udzirngu changed as a result of contact with the American missionaries. However, to clearly understand this change in the architecture of the Margi domestic sphere, I must first make an effort to understand its effect on the Margi people socially

### ***Thesis statement***

My research examines the loss of Margi Udzirngu cultural identity or what I call de-Margi-nization, and the loss of the Margi method of approaching and worshipping God, and whether these losses were worth what they gained from the American missionaries, namely Christianity and Euro-American modern culture. This thesis will ask what has become of 21<sup>st</sup> century Margi: how have they changed, and is it for the better?

## ***Methodology***

After extensive consultation with my advisers, the consensus appeared to be that an ethnographic approach would be appropriate for my research. More specifically, I make use of the emic perspective, in which an observer not only sees what is happening but feels what it is like to be part of the group. The group, in this case, is the Margi Udzirngu of northeastern Nigeria. Since I am a Margi Udzirngu, and I grew up in a Margi Udzirngu household, I am a participant observer, and I share as intimately as possible the life and the activities of the Margi Udzirngu culture.<sup>2</sup>

I rely heavily on personal experience—what I saw, felt and participated in—as well as observation. My ethnographic approach includes my ability to speak the Margi language and my participation in the culture in terms of every traditional observation or yearly festival, and the documentation produced by my elders that validates my conclusions. It also includes interviewing my father and his peers, who were fifteen- or sixteen-years of age when the missionaries came in 1948. My father is now seventy-five and has a very sound memory.

I quote or narrate what they told me, hoping that my work will give a new construct or paradigm for thinking about the Margi Udzirngu, for future empirical testing in the field or through traditional quantitative methods. I am aware that my perspective on my own culture could easily cloud my judgment during this research, and may give an indication of bias in my analysis; to avoid this, I have made arrangements with four other members of the Margi ethnic group—one a former professor of veterinary

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<sup>2</sup> See “Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods,” by Michael Quinn Patton, 2002

medicine and now a scientist at the United States Department of Agriculture, one an experienced political scientist, and an External Examiner at Nigeria's prestigious Institute of Transport Technology, Zaria, and one a veterinary doctor, and one my mentor since I was fourteen, the former cultural officer for the defunct Gongola State government and a retired permanent secretary in the present Adamawa State Government, each of whom grew up in Margi households—to verify and critique my thinking.

I use the ethnographic approach in combination with the available literatures. More specifically, I examine Ahmad B. Furtu's work in Arabic, translated to English in 1987 by Derik Lange (Bornu Expeditions of Idris Alauma (1564-1576) according to the Account of Ahmad B. Furtu); Heinrich Barth's (1849-1855) detailed records of his travel through Margi land (Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa Vol II); C.K. Meek's Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria Volume II (1931). Finally I will analyze what the missionaries themselves revealed in their letters written to the United States Church of the Brethren and published in the Church Gospel Messenger, available to me through the Church of the Brethren Historical Library and Archives in Elgin, Illinois.

### ***Context within Scholarship***

#### **W. E. B. DuBois**

W. E. B. DuBois was of the opinion that the black race are at the bottom of the social ladder—the last to be included or to benefit (1903) He suggests the black

race is born with a veil, which means, for example, that while blacks believe themselves to be psychically gifted, they show neither advanced abilities nor interest. To me it may as well mean that the black race is separated from the American dream—what they see is not available to them because of a hindrance by the majority.

He also refers to black Americans as being gifted with a second-sight; what this means is that American whites deliberately created an environment to which black Africans were brought against their will and have been forced to see themselves through American culture. While black people still embodied their sense of being African, they had no option but to be engulfed by a new culture in a new land. The new emerging black American identity embodied two different repulsive cultures. Black Americans had not lost their identity—they held on to both an African and an American identity, but they were no longer fully African, and were they fully considered American. As result of this, they developed the tendency to look at themselves through the eyes of their American overlords, using the American paradigm as a yard-stick to measure their achievement and always falling short. Ultimately their struggle strengthened the hegemonic American culture while the culture of the black race dwindled.

“Double-consciousness” is thus an apt term to describe the relationship between the white missionaries and the Margi Udzirngu people. Surely the missionaries came with the preconceived notion of cultural superiority. Over and over they used the words “primitive people,” and “primitive land” to justify bringing the

Margi a so-called “cleaner” way of living. Double-consciousness describes the confusion of mixing African traditional medicine and the American missionary tablets, the new way of worshipping God in the chapel as opposed to worshipping outdoors in the Margi way, the fruits from missionary gardens and the guinea corn, the noise of the missionary generator as opposed to the quiet of burning wood.

While the missionaries did not adjust their own ways of life; the Margi Udzirngu people—especially young men and women—started to embody two new cultures: the new and the old ways of living. They started to see themselves in light of what the missionaries believed: double-consciousness on African soil.

I am therefore approaching the story of my people, the Margi Udzirngu, within the framework of “Double Consciousness.” While I do not necessarily agree that the Margi Udzirngu are born with a veil, I wholeheartedly agree that the Margi Udzirngu people have been gifted with second sight. I will analyze the work of W.E.B. DuBois as it applies to the Margi Udzirngu’s struggle with identity in light of the new Euro-American culture neatly woven into the Christian religion, which was brought to them by German descendants with American passports.

### **Benedict Anderson**

The main point of Benedict Anderson’s critique of previous notions of nationalism in Imagined Communities has roots in the beginning of cultural discourse among primordial ethnic groups. Over the years, these primordial cultural discourses were interpreted in various cultures around the globe; they were first transformed into

norms capable of shaping territorial self-consciousness, then were refined into regional political and ideological constellations.

According to Anderson, the creation of imagined communities became possible because of "print-capitalism." Capitalist entrepreneurs printed their books and media in the vernacular in order to maximize circulation. As a result, readers speaking various local dialects became able to understand each other. Anderson is right: the first thing the missionaries did when they came to Nigeria was to translate the New Testament into the Margi and Bura languages. Luke became "Luka"; the book of Mathew became "Matta." I came to know the Jesus of the English Bible as "Yesu."

Anderson argues that "language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of Babel [...] Print language is what invented nationalism, not a particular language *per se*" (p. 134.) To illustrate this point, take the word "Lardin Gabas," a term used for the area that comprises all the ethnic groups with which the Brethren missionaries worked. The ethnic subgroups would not know even the members who felt camaraderie within a particular subgroup because of shared values and interests; however, failure to know all of the members of one's group causes the group's "togetherness" to only be imagined. Instead of having a real relationship, members hold in their minds a mental image of their mutual affinity.

Anderson goes on to suggest there shouldn't be any quarrel over taking the phenomenon of imagined community back to where it all began. This concept is particularly useful for explaining how ethnic groups have evolved into subgroups and have covered large territories to the point that they no longer know one another as individuals, but continue to imagine the existence of the other members of the group. With the coming of the colonial order to Nigeria, imaginary territorial boundaries were constructed; placing the Marga ethnic groups under the emirates with some limited social and structural power, and each with their own particular challenges to becoming a community. At the same time, the Marga settlements existed within the government's bureaucratic and ideological framework of variously defined objectives to tax the inhabitants. On the one hand, there were the deliberate objectives of the colonial order to create and maintain an "imagined community"; on the other hand, the missionaries showed up and they tapped into this community framework already organized by the colonialist.

TRIBAL GROUPS ENUMERATED IN THE CENSUS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA 1952

Province	Major groups								Additional groups	Other Northern tribes	Other Nigerian tribes	Non-Nigerians	
	Edo	Fulani	Hausa	Ibibio	Ibo	Kanuri	Nupe	Tiv					Yoruba
Adamawa	x	x	x	..	x	x	..	x	..	—	x	x	x
Bauchi	..	x	x	x	x	x	x	..	x	—	x	x	x
Benue	..	x	x	..	x	x	x	x	x	Bassa, Egedde, Gwari, Idoma, Kutev	x	x	x
Bornu	..	x	x	..	x	x	..	..	x	Babur, Beddawa, Bura, Shuwa Arab	x	x	x
Ilorin	..	x	x	..	x	..	x	..	x	Borgawa, Bussawa, Kamberi	x	x	x
Kabba	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Bassa Komo, Gwari, Igala, Igbirra, Owe	x	x	x
Kano	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	Maguzawa	x	x	x
Katsina	..	x	x	..	x	x	x	..	x	—	x	x	x
Niger	..	x	x	..	x	x	x	..	x	Dakarawa, Dukawa, Kamberi, Kamuku, Gwari	x	x	x
Plateau	x	x	x	..	x	x	x	x	x	Angas, Birom, Eggon, Sura, Yergam	x	x	x
Sokoto	..	x	x	..	x	x	x	..	x	Adarawa, Arawa, Zaberuawa, Northern Pagan tribes	x	x	x
Zaria	x	x	x	..	x	x	x	..	x	Gwari, Jaba, Kaje, Kadara, Katab	x	x	x

This table was created by a Northern Nigerian administrator to enable taxation.

## **Overview of Content**

In chapter two, I outline the historical background of the Margi ethnic group's first contact with the outside world, concentrating on how the Margi ethnic groups were viewed by foreign contacts, and in turn how the Margi ethnic groups viewed themselves through the eyes of the new contacts. Most of the information I use in this chapter comes from Idris Alauma's interaction, recounted by his closest follower and confident, Ahmad B. Furtu, originally recorded in Arabic and then translated into English in 1987 by Derik Lange; Heinrich Barth's detailed records of his travel through Margi land; and C.K. Meek's contact with the Margi in the year 1931. Finally, I refer to my own experience as a Margi man born and raised in a typical Margi ethnic household.

In chapter three, I discuss the historical background of the Church of the Brethren Mission and refer to the two men and their families who were the pioneers of the Church of the Brethren missionaries to Africa. I ask why the church felt the need to start work in this part of the world. I examine the obstacles the missionaries faced as they attempted to build a mission station, schools, dispensaries, and churches. I investigate how the Margi Udzirngu responded to the missionaries, and the changes that came to the Margi Udzirngu through their missionary work. More specifically, I consider whether the American culture that was brought to Margi land in any way benefited or improved the living conditions of the Margi in any meaningful way and in what ways the missionary work contributed to the de-Margi-nization of my people.

In chapter four, I theorize that the Margi traditional ways of living and the missionaries' so-called "modern" ways imported into the Margi land are not contradictory, but, nevertheless, the two cultures failed to meet on a middle ground. I rely on the opinions of the elders from this area, including the Margi elders. All of them are earlier graduates of the missionary schools and collaborated with some of the missionaries to write the book, Lardin Gabas: A Land, A People, and A Church in 1973, from which I draw some conclusions about the missionaries. I also supplement these analyses with what I saw, felt, and learned when growing up, and also as an adult.

### ***Contribution***

The significance of this research is that a historical review of the beliefs and the cultural heritage of the Margi people is reconstructed first hand in light of what has already been written by the missionaries themselves. Some of the issues that have not yet been addressed in terms of the political and social significance of this cultural assimilation are analyzed. I seek to reconstruct the journey and evolution of this group in terms of cultural change, from the stacked stone round hut hamlets in the mountainous enclave to European bungalows at the foothill of the mountain. Finally, I narrate the process of de-culturalization: the loss of religion and way of life, the transition from what seems to have been a crude form of Judaism to full-fledged Christianity. I discuss this in the light of DuBois' idea of double consciousness and Anderson's "imagined communities."

As a member of the Margi tribe, I have an obligation to show the world who the Margi are and how the tribe has evolved towards integration into modern society. Most importantly, the Margi children, especially those born in the developed world, should know the heritage of their ancestors. If my generation does not live up to the challenge of filling in the missing link in the current available literature, then our history will be lost completely.

## Chapter 2 Pre-modern Texts

### *Introduction*

In my search for information about the Margi ethnic group, the Mandara Publishing Company, a London based not-for-profit digital and print publisher, confirmed my assumption that there is no literature available earlier than Ahmad B. Furtu's work in Arabic, which was translated to English in 1987 by Derik Lange. The only exception is Fra Mauro's 1459 map, which is considered to be the "First mentioning of 'Mergi'<sup>3</sup>" in the literatures, which places the Margi and other ethnic groups in this general area in the correct geographical location (<http://www.mandaras.info/Margi.html>).

With this in mind, I will proceed to outline the historical background of the first contact of the Margi ethnic group with the outside world, concentrating on how the Margi ethnic groups were viewed by these foreign contacts, and in turn how the Margi ethnic groups viewed themselves through the eyes of the new contacts. What is the common theme between these contacts, the three persons from different countries and cultures? Most of the information in this section comes from the foreigners that came to the Margi environ and interacted with them: Idris Alauma's interaction

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to note that the current spelling is 'Margi.' Mr. Fra Mauro spelled it as 'Mergi' on his map; while Heinrich Barth spelled it 'Marghi'. Other literature also adopted Barth's version.

(1564-1576) as interpreted by, Ahmad B. Furtu; Barth's travel diaries, and Meek's writings. I also refer to my own experiences.

### **Idris Alauma's Expedition**

“The ruler of the Margi then came to the town of Birni, and entered into the presence of the Sultan and settled down before him, kneeling and prostrating himself, casting earth upon his head with both hands together humble and abject.” Ahmad B. Furtu

According to the Encyclopedia of African History, Borno (Bornu), Sultanate of: Saifawa Dynasty: Horses, Slaves, and Warfare, by Kevin Shillington (p. 159), Idris Alauma descended from the Saifawa Dynasty. The Saifawa's Saif bin Dhi Yazan of Himar (claiming descent from Yemenite cultural hero Saif bin Dhi Yazan of Himar) came to the area Kenam (northeast of Lake Chad) and consolidated power between the tenth and eleventh century. After that, his influence expanded north to Traghan in the Fezzan area (present-day Libya) in the thirteenth century. In due course, his influence waned so that he abandoned Kanem and headed for Borno (southwest of Lake Chad) in the fourteenth century and took over Gazargamo as his capital. This area is believed to be between the present day Nigeria and Niger, and it is where the dynasty experienced its rebirth under the leadership of Idris Alauma (1564 – 1576). The empire expanded to present day Kano in Nigeria, central Sahara, and far south as Gongola River Valley.

Ahmad B. Furtu's work is the oldest record available of the first contact with some of the Margi ethnic groups. In the introduction to the translated English version, Mr. Lange understood the Arabic script to mean that all Idris of Alaumas' expeditions were directed against the Tuaregs and the Margi. The expedition against the Margi started because at a certain point the ruler of the Margi named Adwa refused to join Idris Alauma on expeditions as he usually had done. Adwa who held the position of chief *Umara* under Idris Alauma during the previous campaigns rebelled and totally abstained. This action on the part of Adwa angered Idris Alauma and the showdown began between the two (p. 76).

Lange indicated that *Gajama (Gazama)*, a former Margi town which still exists today, was occupied by members of the *Kanuri* ethnic group, who came to the area at the beginning of the colonial period. The most interesting part of this entry is the fact that the descendants of the last Margi dynasty are reported to be residing only six kilometers to the southeast of the original Gazama. The translator brilliantly connected the old town of Gazama with the modern Gadzama subgroup currently classified as the Margi Babal the subgroup residing in the modern towns of Dille, Huyum, Lassa, Mussa, Chul, and Womdeo, also a few at the town of modern Bitiku.

The main town of modern Lassa, where the majority of the Gadzamas reside is interestingly named Sabon Gari, which literally means "a new town in Hausa." Over the years the spelling has been rewritten to "Gadzama." It is important to note that this is the Margi ethnic group that the Brethren Mission first settled among when the missionaries started penetrating Margi land to plant new stations. Currently, this is

officially part of Borno State with only a few in Adamawa State of northern Nigeria. The Margi were not allowed to collectively remain in one state when the new states of Adamawa, Bauchi, and Borno were created out of the former North Eastern State.

It is not entirely surprising to understand that the Gadzama seem to have been Muslims. This can be attributed for the most part to the contact with Idris Alauma. They were the subgroup among the Margi that seemed to have de-Margi-nized earlier than all the other Margi subgroups; this has been common knowledge among the Margi subgroups since I was young. For example, it is common practice that the Gadzamas marry relatives and do not observe all the Margi traditional beliefs. One could argue, then, that the de-Margi-nizing started with the contact with Idris Alauma and later the Kanuri. Idris Alauma practiced Islam, as he succeeded in bringing Adwa the ruler of the Margi “to book,”<sup>4</sup> we know from experience that the main aim or at least part of the expedition was to spread Islam. The Kanuri’s that came to this area after Idris Alauma’s expedition also adopted Islam and continued the actions of Idris Alauma against the Margi. When the Margis left this general area to the present modern town of Lassa, part of them or most were Muslims.

For some reason Adwa, the ruler of the Margi, decided not to participate in Idris Alauma’s expedition. Apparently after various requests from Idris Alauma to Adwa to come back to the fold and upon receiving no reply, Idris Alauma went after Adwa with vengeance. Idris Alauma marched his army to Kopci, Mitku, and the rocks of Humdi where Idris Alauma reportedly found Adwa’s first wife Gamsu with

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<sup>4</sup> “To book” is a British colloquialism meaning being called to account for one’s actions.

abundant provisions (p. 34). Even though it is not specifically spelled out here, it later became clear that he captured her and brought her with him to Birni where Idris Alauma was residing.

As a Margi man, it is not difficult for me to deduce what is at stake here. Margis are very independent people, and Idris Alauma more than likely expected the ruler of the Margi to be a follower, a “yes man.” Adwa did not see himself through the eyes of the strong man, because Adwa was no such “yes man;” he rebelled.

Alauma knew full well that Adwa would have no choice but to come for his beloved wife, and that was exactly what happened. Adwa cast earth upon his head with both hands in Idris Alauma’s presence, which is typical of Margi when they are in agony. It seems he did this for the sake of his wife. This is to me an affirmation of the mostly coercing relationship that still exists between the weak and the powerful groups in the northern Nigerian states. Idris Alauma clearly used manipulation and coercion, as well as modern warfare equipment, to intimidate the Margi. The primitively armed Margi’s, fearing being subdued by the new power-to-be, started to view Idris Alauma and his entourage as their overlord.<sup>5</sup>

I have no choice but to form an opinion here that Idris Alauma started and set in motion the process of oppressing the minority groups which has now become the norm in northern Nigeria, in this case the Margi ethnic group in Bornu. It was noted later on that the Margi residing in what is now the modern town of Lassa seemed to

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<sup>5</sup> “The ruler of the Margi then came to the town of Birni, and entered into the presence of the Sultan and settled down before him, kneeling and prostrating himself, casting earth upon his head with both hands together humble and abject” (p. 79).

have been Muslims; bearing in mind they were the same ethnic subgroup Idris Alauma started his campaign against, at the same time he campaigned against the Tuaregs why would I then be surprised if Alauma coerced them into becoming Muslims? The habit of causing the so-called pagan tribes to become Muslims has continued to at least the late 1960's when I was still very young but could understand what that meant at that time. My grandfather, as the head of our family unit, resisted just such a requests, but that did not prevent his daughters from marrying Muslim men or converting to Islam along with their husbands after getting married. In retrospect, I do not have an answer as to why he did not resist the missionaries with the same intensity as he did Islam.

Thus, we see that in Furtu's account of Alauma's relations to the Margi in the years of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there are at least hints of how the Margi came to be subordinated within Northeastern Nigeria. The account also suggests how the Margi developed adverse responses to Islamization.

### **Heinrich Barth's Travels across Margi land**

Heinrich Barth, a German explorer in British service, was born in Hamburg and educated at Berlin University, graduating in 1844. He joined the expedition to Western Sudan in 1849 after learning Arabic and other African Languages in England. Within the current Nigerian territorial boundaries, he visited the Margi, the Fulani, the Hausa, and many other ethnic groups. Barth's interest in the Islamic culture of West Africa led him on to as far as Timbuktu in present day Mali. (Kirk-Green, 1962)

In Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa Vol. II, Heinrich Barth recorded his contact with the Margi ethnic group, beginning with 'Molghoy,' which is modern Mulqwe, through Izege to the periphery of Uba, the last Margi town before entering Mubi, which is situated in present Adamawa State. Knowing this area, he must have had first-hand contact with some of the present Margi Udzirngu, the subjects of this thesis.

On Saturday, June 7, 1851, at about one o'clock in the afternoon, Heinrich Barth set his eyes on the first Margi-Mulqwe hamlets. He spent the night and made the following notes: "Each family has its own separate court-yard, which forms a little cluster of huts by itself, and often at a considerable distance from the next yard. This kind of dwelling has certainly something very cheerful and pleasant in a simple and peaceable state of society" (p. 106). After describing the geographical space of the Margi at Mulgwe, turning his attention to the inhabitants, Dr. Barth had this to say: "I was struck by the beauty and symmetry of their form, which were thus entirely exposed to view, and by regularity of their features, which are not disfigured by incisions, and in some had nothing of what is called the Negro type" (p. 106). He viewed a young Margi child in the village as follows: "The boy's form did not yield in any respect to the beautiful symmetry of the most celebrated Grecian statues, as that of the praying boy, or that of the diskophoros" (p. 107). I am not surprised by Dr. Barth's assessment—remember, he was just passing through. He had no intention of remaining among the Margi to de-culturize them, nothing to lose or no reason to intentionally putting them down, as most hegemonic tactics would do. In this case,

his commentary is just an honest assessment or a survey being done for Great Britain, who was then his sponsor.

Two more of his observations are worth mentioning here. He indicated that when trying to buy a chicken from two young Margi Mulgwe girls, the girls spoke Kanuri with him while speaking Margi among themselves. This is very common among the Mulgwe Margi, because of the short distance from the Kanuri-speaking Bornu. Unlike the other Margi subgroups, who do not understand Kanuri, the Margi residing at Mulgwe have over the years adopted parts of the Kanuri culture, like the women's hair dressing, or their cooking, as well as learning to speak the Kanuri language. Many became Muslims; this trend had also engulfed the Margi of Izege, which lies east of Mulgwe.

Barth's commentary illustrates an example of the blurred demarcation that exists between ethnic groups even among those divided by the imposed imaginary territorial boundaries that are called "nation-states" in today's Africa. When the national boundaries were imaginarily erected, little did the colonialists know or care that some of these line went through neighborhoods, dividing ethnic groups in half, or even placing fathers' and sons' compounds into separate states. An example of this is: there are Margi in Cameroon while some are in Nigeria. So it is with the Chamba ethnic group; while some are in Nigeria, there also Chambas' that call themselves

Bali Chamba living in the republic of Cameroon. The town Bali they refer to is in Nigeria--their ancestral home.<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Barth's last comment before leaving Mulqwe was, "Indeed, it is very lamentable to see the national well-being and humble happiness of these pagan communities trodden down so mercilessly by their Mohammedan neighbors" (p.109). This comment speaks to and is validated by the occurrences during Idris Alauma's expedition almost two hundred years earlier. The trend started by Idris Alauma's expedition of coercion and intimidation is still being done to the Margi by the Kanuri majority. Barth speaks to themes that might still be noticed by someone who has come into contact with the Margi for only a few hours. It is more significant, as it is spoken by a different person, a stranger from a different culture, and different part of the world—a distant Germany.

After approximately a half day's journey, Dr. Barth reportedly arrived at Izege at about one o'clock on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June, 1851. When he arrived at the first cluster of Margi huts near the Izege village, he wrote the following: "A first glance at this landscape impressed me with the conviction that I had at length arrived at a seat of the indigenous inhabitants, which, although it had eventually felt the influence of its overbearing and merciless neighbors, had not yet been altogether despoiled by their hands" (p.111). Dr. Barth and his entourage were impressed not only with the inhabitants but also with the landscape. In addition he observed that he could clearly see the faces of oppressed people, despite the fact that were the indigenous

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Dr. Ben Page of University College London and Dr. Claire Mercer of London School of Economic both has done research with the Bali group in Cameroon and London.

inhabitants, living on their own land. But to Barth, most of the Margi he came across were already showing mixed mannerisms in terms of adopting the culture of the majority ethnic groups in the general area, like the Kanuri.

Another entry he made seems to reveal the dissatisfaction the subjects had with their Bornu-installed “Billama.”<sup>7</sup> “Billama” refers to a ward head or a leader of a group of hamlets. Frankly, as I was growing up in late 1960s to middle 1970s, the leadership of the Bulama was generally given to the extended family patriarchs for the sole purpose of collecting taxes and settling simple extended family disputes. Along the way, greed engulfed these family patriarchs and they began to tell on their own people. The Bulama would tell the authorities if a male child had reached an age to pay taxes, even if the family could not afford it, simply because the Bulama got a certain percentage of the taxes.

Apart from performing the above-mentioned functions, there was no real authority behind the office of the Bulama. The installation of the Bulama is at the discretion of the Ptil (King) in Margi land, but for some reason the Bulama of the Margi Izege at the time of Barth's visit was appointed by the King of Borno. This is Dr. Barth's observation regarding the “Billama”: “[this is] a man who, betraying his native country, had placed himself under the authority of the Bornu people, in the hope that, with their assistance, he might gratify his ambition by becoming the tyrant of his compatriot” (p.112). It is no wonder then that the fellow in the village the

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<sup>7</sup> Actually spelled “Bulama” in today's lexicon.

Billama had assigned to host Dr. Barth and his entourage refused to do so. Dr. Barth continues:

“The reason, however, why they behave so inhospitably towards me evidently was that they took me for an officer of the King of Bornu; but this impression gave way the longer they observed my manners and things; indeed, as soon as they saw the tent, they became aware that it was not a tent like those of their enemies, and they came to the same conclusion with regard to the greater part of my luggage” (p. 113).

Dr. Barth admitted that these same people treated him even more kindly when he returned through their village on his way back from Fombina (p. 113). Dr. Barth noticed the presence of few Fulbe ‘Fulani’<sup>8</sup> in Izege when he was there.

Approaching the Margi Udzirngu domain, most of Dr. Heinrich Barth’s observation turned to some of the physical features around him. He made comments about Magar, and what he called Shambela village, actually called “Hyambula,” which literally means “the roots of the Tamarind trees;” and ‘Sugu,’ which is actually called Sukur.<sup>9</sup> This to me is an indication that Dr. Barth had arrived at the location where the Margi Udzirngus<sup>10</sup> reside; because these are Margi Udzirngu villages. Dr. Barth walked across the Gulak plain, just a mile or two inside the mountainous enclaves. I cannot say with certainty if they were still at ‘Mpsakali’ which is another

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<sup>8</sup> This is the same Fulbe people that would go on to organize the Jihad in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>9</sup>The word “Sukur” refers to the Sukur-speaking people. Their king is referred to as “La” in the Sukur language.

<sup>10</sup> “The Margi that reside near the mountain.” The subgroup I belong to was called “Birthing” at the time, but with the arrival of the missionaries they started to spell it Birdling and it stacked.

name for a town called Gudur, currently located in the Cameroon republic (Green p. 433).

Barth finally wrote about the Margi Udzirngu of Magar villages:

“While returning to our encampment, my companion, who was an altogether agreeable sort of person, gave me some more information with regard to the Margi, whom he represented as a numerous tribe, stronger than even the Manga, and capable of sending thirty thousand armed men into the field. He told me that it was their peculiar custom to mourn for the death of the young man and be merry at the death of the old one” (p.115).

I cannot agree more with his assessment of the Margi custom to mourn, because that was exactly what was happening when I was growing up. But I have my reservations about the number of armed men that he reports could be sent out to the field. This is, in my opinion, not a true statement about the Margi Udzirngu, though I cannot generalize for the rest of the Margi, hardly a place large enough to send 30,000 young men to battle. This is because the reference made here was referring to just a village within the general area.

In the eyes of Heinrich Barth, since there were no churches, cathedrals or other places of worship as in his home Germany, the Margi were “pagan communities” (p.117). This was the same situation I grew up in 100 years after Dr. Barth passed through as the same can be said of those who came to preach Christianity. American missionaries also considered the Margi as “pagan communities.” The difference from their predecessors was that they used non-violent

methods, a polite war of cultural assimilation, rather than violent intimidation. The Margi were too polite to resist the White missionaries' culture, especially when his approach was kind and giving, when he is helping "you look like me, speak like me, and view the world through my spectacles."

I have no reason to doubt the rest of Dr. Barth's assessment of the Margi's passive nature towards the larger groups around them. So that even if these villages had 30,000 young men they could not have been sent to battle given the precedents Idris Alauma set in motion in the 1400s. Hundreds of years later, as a child, I smelled the oppression in the air from the dominant groups. As for the case of the missionaries 300 years after Idris Alauma, they were veritable "Gandhi's" of deculturalization; however, although in the process they gave the Margi Udzirngu more in terms of what the Margis' immediate needs were at that time, their gift had its own strings attached. In essence they were saying to the Margi Udzirngu, "Come, let's go to God through *my* path; your path is dark and full of thorns."

Dr. Barth's view of the Margi differed from that of Idris Alauma's. Barth's quest was to understand the people and leave them as he found them, perhaps to use the information later: Idris Alaumas tried to manipulate, coerce, and dominate them. The Margi, in turn, viewed Barth as a friend, someone from a distant land who had possessions and knowledge they did not necessarily have. They did not view him as a threat (Barth p. 113). In the case of Idris Alauma, they did not think of him as a friend, nor did he have possessions or knowledge that they did not have; that is why Adwa the king of Margi did not feel the need to follow Idris Alauma. Instead the

Margi were afraid of his tendency for violence when things did not go his way (Lange p. 76).

It is clear that tension between the dominant groups and the minorities in Africa historically were unpleasant and violent long before colonialism; still, the colonial authorities reinforced the tension and gave it a fancy name (in Northern Nigeria at least) “Indirect Rule.”<sup>11</sup> Some analyst’s certainly see colonialism purely based on greed and inhuman decisions made by demon-driven wealth acquirers. Today, I see myself and my children in the eyes of Dr. Barth, “not yielding in any respect to the beautiful symmetry of the most celebrated Grecian statue,”\*\* but I do not feel intellectually deficient. If I have the slightest feeling of such deficiency, it is because I have an extra wealth of cultural experience to draw from, and may be running out of space in my brain. Dr. Barth’s observations lead me to ask, “is the past a foreign country?” To me, the answer is no; who I am today is the same person of the past refined, reaffirmed and validated. I appreciate the modern world because of my so-called primitive past and yet during difficulties, I would escape to the past in a split second.

### **C.K. Meek’s Contact and the Classification of the Margi into Subgroups**

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<sup>11</sup> “Indirect rule”...**Indirect rule... Refers to a method of administration developed by British Colonial officers**, to ruler many of its colonies. It was first started during the nineteenth century in India, where two-thirds of British India was ruled through the native princes. The most prominent advocate of such rule was Frederick Lugard, who developed indirect rule in Nigeria in 1912–19, and expounded the idea in his *Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (1922).

Although C. K. Meek was an employee of the Nigerian Government, it was the Government of Nigeria in name only. The colonial secretary of England ruled through his colonial officers. C.K. Meeks was, therefore, one of many colonial officers with the assignment of documenting who was where, who was related to whom, and who got along with whom. Most importantly, who were these people living in this new arid region called Northern Nigeria? The information he obtained would make administering the territory easier, as the colonial officers were only just beginning to understand what the region was all about.

Although Meek was just one of the colonial officers, there was something that set him apart in terms of his assignment; he was assigned to unravel the ethnic names that are similar and confusing within a confined geographical space, to tag the subjects and pin each closely related one to an identifiable geographical space.

In the fourth chapter of Meek's Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria, Volume 2, the Margi ethnic groups are subdivided into the following subgroups and placed geographically as follows:

- A. Margi Putai (most western geographically) those currently residing at Mulqwe, Izege and the environs;
- B. Margi Mba Kedangi (South Margi, known as Kibagu, residing at Chibok)
- C. Margi Babal (this includes those residing at Bitiku, Lassa, Dille, Mussa, Chul, Uba, Uvu, Wamdeo and environs);

- D. Margi Udzirngu (this includes those residing at Gulak, Duhu [Dluku], Middlu, Hyambula, Madagali, Maiva , Wanu, Humbili [Ghumbili] and the environs); and
- E. Margi Wandala (those in the Cameroon Republic).

As indicated earlier, the Margi subgroups occupy the geographical region of the Southern part of Borno and the northern Adamawa states of today's Republic of Nigeria. They are also in the north-western parts of the Cameroon Republic, where Meek's Wandala subgroup of the Margi resided. Just like any of the Bantu subgroups that migrated across Africa, the Margi did not migrate all at the same time. Rather, the migration occurred in subgroups and at different times. The common theme between these migrations is language, culture, and that each subgroup has always claimed to have come from the East (Kirk-Green, A. H. M, 1958, p.18).

C.K. Meek, then, in addition to fulfilling his obligation to his employers, gave the outside world a code of reference on which academic and secular discourse pertaining to Margi could be based. In addition, he has given people like me a point of reference, whether or not it is accurate, to begin rewriting my own history. He classified the Margi based on their geographical location which in turn is based on extended family relationships. History has shown that, as human families expand closely related groups separate from each other in sub-units and relocate to different areas. This continues, and as time passes by some words in the common language begin to differ slightly as each group adapts to a new location. This phenomenon is

wide spread across Africa, and the Margi ethnic groups are not different (Newman, 1995, Isichei, 2004, Oldham & Gibson, 1931).

Ultimately, Meeks study should be seen as a practical example of how Britain's indirect rule system fixed the ethnic geographies of the continent. It is not so much that his typology of the Margi that was off the mark. Rather, the impact comes from Meek's fixing in rigorous spaces groupings that were previously understood much more fluidly. That fixing is hard to get out of the landscape, the ethnic politics, or the heads of people like me (Myers, 2002).

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Origin of the Brethren Missions and their Coming to Margi Land**

#### ***Introduction***

This chapter discusses the historical background of the Church of the Brethren Mission and the first two sets of Brethren missionaries to Africa, their main purpose for coming, and their activities among the Margi Udzirngu. I will describe the obstacles the missionaries faced as they attempted to build a mission station, schools, dispensaries, and churches. I will also discuss how the Margi Udzirngu responded to the missionaries and the changes that came to the Margi Udzirngu through the missionary work. More specifically, I will consider whether the Christian religion embroidered with American culture that was brought to Margi land benefited or improved living conditions in a meaningful way, for which Margi people, and in what ways the missionary work contributed to the de-Margi-nization of the Margi Udzirngu ethnic group.

#### ***Background***

According to Rev. Raymond Hickey's Christianity in Borno State and Northern Gongola (1984), the Church of the Brethren was founded in Germany by Mr. Alexander Mack in the year 1708 as part of the Anabaptist movement. Due to the friction that developed between this new movement and the established churches over the issue of infant baptism, the Brethren left Germany in 1719 and moved to the

United States, where the Church of the Brethren is strongest today. Operating from its United States base, the church found a place for itself in the history books because it did not discriminate as to what part of the world was deemed appropriate for mission work. One such place was a region straddling northeastern Nigeria and northwestern Cameroon.

History and destiny chose two gentlemen, Mr. Kulp and Mr. Helser, and their wives and families to go into the unknown, and subsequently write their own history, the history of a place and its inhabitants, and perhaps leave the place and its people transformed.

### ***The Arrival of Mr. Kulp and Mr. Helser and their Families in Biu and Garkida***

“Oh God, save the Bura people! Though I walk through the valley of darkness I shall fear no evil. For thou are with me.”

Last words of Ruth Kulp who died in Bura Land, Nigeria, age 28, June 1924.

In 1916, Dr. Karl Kumm, the founder of Sudan United Mission (SUM), now Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) began campaigning in the United States. He encouraged several churches, including the Church of the Brethren, to join and be part of a multi-denominational group that had begun mission work in sub-Saharan Africa. In 1919, at the International Mission Conference, it was reaffirmed that one of the strategic areas for mission work was south of the Sahara in Africa. The participants of the conference theorized there are many animistic ethnic groups that

would respond favorably to the Christian religion, and that if nothing were done, these animistic ethnic groups would be in danger of embracing Islam.

In the year 1921, the Church of the Brethren at its Annual Conference in Hershey, Pennsylvania, decided to begin their own missionary program instead of joining the multi-denominational group suggested by Dr. Karl Kumn in 1916. This decision came after the group of representatives visited Africa in 1920 on their way home from India; the Brethren selected northern Nigeria as the place to begin their mission work.

In 1922, H. Stover Kulp and Albert Helser were appointed to start the mission. Later that same year they left the United States and arrived in Lagos in December. At the initial stage, they were received favorably by the governor, Sir Hugh Clifford, and were further encouraged by the deputy governor of northern Nigeria at Kaduna, Mr. Gower. Mr. Gower encouraged the missionaries to consider establishing their mission work among the Bura people of Biu plateau in southern Bornu Province, Nigeria.

When the missionaries arrived in Biu on February 12, 1923 (Hickey 1984), they learned the Bura tribe of this area had been placed under the chief of Pabir, who was not only Muslim, but also had the support of the British District Officer acting in line with the terms of indirect rule.<sup>12</sup> This was a common practice in northern Nigeria during the period of indirect rule, whereby all pagan communities were placed in the emirates ruled by the Muslim emirs according to The Dual Mandate<sup>13</sup>. The

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<sup>12</sup> The Resident of Bornu Province, Sir Richmond Palmer, and the District Officer for Biu Division, Major Frank Edgar, were strong believers in the system of Indirect Rule, a term coined by Lord Lugard and practiced by his successors in northern Nigeria. (Lugard 1922).

<sup>13</sup> The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa was the agreement between Britain and the emirs.

missionaries immediately experienced opposition from the chief of the Pabir tribe who instructed the missionaries to move forty miles east of Biu. They settled in a village called Garkida, where other Bura ethnic groups resided.

Garkida is about seventy-five miles southwest of Gulak, where most of the Margi Udzirngu, the subject of this thesis resides, and about fifty miles from Lassa, where part of the Margi Babal resided. It is believed that the Bura and the Margi ethnic groups are related and speak languages with common words. This relationship consequently helped in the work of the church as it developed since both ethnic groups were of a similar background and could be assimilated by one church with one faith and could strive towards common social, political, and economic interests.<sup>14</sup>

The application made by the missionaries to establish a mission station in Garkida was approved by the Resident of Bornu Province, Sir Richmond Palmer, only because the venture had already received the blessings of both the governor of Nigeria in Lagos, Sir Hugh Clifford, and the deputy governor of the northern region at Kaduna, Mr. Gower. But the approval was followed by series of hostilities by Palmer and the District Officer for Biu Division, Major Frank Edgar. The determination of the officers of the British government to keep Bornu province free of missionary influence can be seen in the fact that Palmer detached the village of Garkida from Bornu province and included it in Adamawa province, with its capital in Yola, in November of the year the mission work started in Garkida.

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<sup>14</sup> Such cooperation was evident to me from my youth onward, upon seeing Bura people for the first time coming to Gulak village for a church conference, and Bura teachers and other workers coming and going from my village, Gulak.

In a nutshell, the system of indirect rule supported the authorities of the Muslim emirs by giving them power over the pagan ethnic groups within their emirates. Bornu Province was considered to be one of the strongest Muslim areas in northern Nigeria, and the British colonial officers were not about to take any chances of upsetting the emirs who were responsible for helping British officials to govern the northern Nigerian populace. As such, the administration was reluctant to welcome a Christian mission to the province.

I believe that such action was in the interest of the British Government in terms of the cost of administering the territory (Ann Phillips, 1989). For example, if officials cooperated in this manner with the emirs, the British government only needed one administrative district officer in each district. The emirs and their subordinates were actually responsible for all the administrative work, including collecting tax monies from the subjects within their emirates; while the rest of British staff were busy exploring what they could extract from the territories to feed their industries back in England (Freund, 1984).

March 17, 1923, marks the formal beginning of the Church of Brethren's mission work in this general area, the day when Stover Kulp preached his first sermon under a tamarind tree. A memorial plaque was erected under this same tree on March 17, 1983, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this historic event. Kulp and Helser were very aware of the influence of Islam in the region, and so, in addition to wanting to preach the gospel, they also worked on ways to blunt the influence of the Islamic faith. The common source of adherents to both Christianity and Islam was the African

Traditional Religion (ATR), often referred to as paganism. The Bura ethnic group, now the hosts of Messer's Kulp and Helser, were living a way of life quite unlike the one with which these guests were familiar.

It is true that the Bura ethnic group responded favorably to the Christian religion, and it is likely that they could have just as easily embraced Islam, but it should also be noted that these animistic ethnic groups, including the Margi, resisted such conversion prior to the plebiscites.(see Green 1964) The favorable response to Christianity predicted at the 1916 International Mission Conference was true to some extent especially among the newer generations. However, When it came to the older generations, the missionaries experienced resistance to the new way of life because they exerted pressure on the older generation to let go some of their wives and to retain only one in accordance with the Christian creed seeing marriage as constituted by "one man, one woman."

The Church of the Brethren, just like any other hegemonic organization, believed that their religion and culture were superior to the so-called "animistic tribes" they were venturing to save from the influence of Islam. They also believed the same about Islam, which is why this competition was set in motion in the first place.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The determination of who might be qualified to judge the superiority of either religion and/or culture is outside of the parameters of this thesis.

### ***The beginning of the Mission to the Margi tribe***

Now that the missionaries were officially residents of Adamawa province, any further decision regarding the missionaries' activities would be decided in Yola, the capital of Adamawa, rather than Maiduguri, the capital of Bornu. This was better for the missionaries, as about 70% of Adamawa residents were non-Muslim. This meant the missionaries had more area to work with in Adamawa Province without venturing into predominately Muslim neighborhoods.

In 1927, two important events happened that would impact the Margi as an ethnic group. One of these events was when the missionaries made the decision to seek and obtain permission from Yola to plant the first mission station among the Margi people of Dille village. This was later moved to Lassa village. This decision was solely made due to the harsh environment encountered at Dille. The second of these memorable events was when Haman Yaji, a district head stationed at Madagali by the Germans, was finally captured, dethroned and sent into exile to Sokoto by the British authorities. Haman Yaji as district head was armed with guns by the Germans for the purpose of fighting the British. He later decided to use arms obtained from the Germans to terrorize the Margi Udzirngu and other tribes residing in and around the Mandara Mountains (Vaughn & Kirk-Greene 1995).

This latter development calmed the security situation in the area. The result was that most of the Margi Udzirngu came out of the mountainous enclave to the slopes, which would later facilitate effective contact with the missionaries (as Awidau

Papka put in an interview with me: “We finally felt safe to come out of the mountain in 1937-38”).

### ***The Arrival of Mr. and Mrs. Bowman***

As they go out to serve God’s children in the lands beyond the seas, the prayers of the church go with them.

Our Mission Works Magazine, April 20th, 1946.

According to Paul B. Studebaker of Modesto, California, in biographical article published in the Church of the Brethren’s magazine, the Gospel Messenger, dated April 20<sup>th</sup> 1946, James Brubaker Bowman was born in Hagerstown, Indiana in 1916. His wife, Merle Allen Bowman, was born in 1915 in Dumont, Iowa; they met at Bethany Training School in Chicago, Illinois, and were married in 1937.

Mr. Bowman’s interest in becoming a missionary in Africa is said to have been influenced in part by Desmond Bittinger’s book, Sudan’s Second Sun-up. After Mr. Bowman completed his training in 1945, he and his wife Merle were commissioned along with ten others in North Manchester, Indiana, during the Church of the Brethren annual conference, as missionaries to Africa. On March 6<sup>th</sup> 1946, Mr. and Mrs. Bowman left for Northern Nigeria to join his predecessors, Messrs Kulp and Helser and their families and arrived in Lagos on March 25, 1946 (Gospel Messenger, 1946, p. 15). Mr. and Mrs. Bowman spent the first year and a half receiving training in the Garkida and Lassa stations prior to their assignment in May of 1948 to start the station in Gulak among the Margi Udzirngu people.

## **The Schools and Church among the Margi Udzirngu**

The Brethren Encyclopedia, Volume 1 (1983) lists the following under Gulak Station:

### **“GULAK STATION**

Gulak was first opened in 1948 by Mr. and Mrs. James Bowman.

Work in the area first centered on the C.R.I. at Duku which has been opened earlier by M. Risku.

The first buildings build were used as residence and later put to their intended use as a dispensary and school buildings. Early C.R.I.s from

Gulak was at Bitiku, Midlu and Hynbula. The first teacher of the school was M.Tumba Yafa. M. Amtagu, M. Dzugwahi and M.

Bulama were among the first from Gulak to be baptized.

The C.B.M. in 1967 turned the station over to the Basel Mission”  
(Volume 1 A-J).

When Mr. and Mrs. Bowman came to Gulak as the first missionaries in 1948, there were various Margi Udzirngu subgroups residing in Gulak and the environs. One such subgroup of the Margi Udzirngu is the Birthings, the subgroup I belong to.<sup>16</sup> My father confirmed, without a shadow of doubt that the Birthing subgroup came from Mpsakali; others call this village Gudur, currently situated in the present republic of Cameroon (Green, 1960, p.70). According to Awidau Papka, this

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<sup>16</sup> The missionaries would later corrupt the name to be spelled “Birdling” so that they could pronounce it easier.

subgroup moved out of Mpsakali, settled at Wanu Village in the Mandara Mountains first and stayed there for several years before moving to the Makwan section of the mountainous enclaves where the Birdling clan settled. This move was made in part to avoid the slave raiders.

My father told me that he was five-years old when they came out of the mountainous enclaves and settled about a mile away from the mountain. When I asked him on four occasions how long this move was made was before the white man Bowman came, his answer on all four occasion was that they were “on the ground,” as he called it, ten or eleven years before Mr. Bowman came to Gulak. He also told me that he was one of those who helped build the first building Bowman resided in when he first came to Gulak. When I asked him how old he was when he was helped with the building, his answer was fifteen- or sixteen-years-of-age. My calculations based on these answers lead me to believe that the missionaries settled close to this Birdling subgroup in Gulak in 1948. The first three converts to the Christian faith, the first two pupils to finish the mission junior primary, the first native headmaster, and the first native pastor of Gulak Village were all from this subgroup.

The Brethren Encyclopedia entry supports the stories told by many Margi parents, mine included. From the year 1948, when Mr. and Mrs. Bowman began the station in Gulak, the missionaries continuously wrote about the progress they were making to the home church in the United States. In September of 1948, Merle Bowman wrote the following to the home church from Gulak in a letter entitled, “Work Begins at Gulak”:

“In August it rained steadily for thirteen days at Gulak. The rainfall for the month was 16.87 inches. James and his African helpers have five weekly meetings at the chiefs’ compound. The meeting on the mission station site is held under a tree. As yet the women are very reticent. About twenty attended these meetings regularly. On Market days we held meetings with many interruptions. They are conducted somewhat in the Salvation Army type. The Africans respond to singing. They really can sing.”

History and stories told by clan elders’ show that Mr. and Mrs. Bowman were well received by the people of Gulak when they came. Mission work had been of tremendous benefit to the Margi at Lassa, and the Margi Gulak knew that.

The first two-room building intended for school was constructed by the villagers living in the immediate vicinity. My father, then at age fifteen or sixteen, was one of those who helped with the communal labor. He recalls working with dedication, believing then that the presence of the missionaries was for the common good of the community. In addition to the buildings, the missionaries planted a big orchard with a variety of fruit trees, such as oranges, bananas, limes, grape fruit, mangoes, papayas and grapes (Bowman, 1951).

The three men mentioned in The Brethren Encyclopedia (1983) as being among the first to be baptized—M. Amtagu, M. Dzugwahi and M. Bulama—were also the first to start the mission school at Gulak. Coincidentally, all three are from the Birdling subgroup because the missionaries settled in the neighborhood where this subgroup resides. Mr. Bowman wrote in “Happenings at Gulak” in the Gospel

Messenger (p.23), December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1951: “In January 1952, some of our pupils will be starting in Standard III, their fifth year of study under our system here in northern Nigeria.”

M. Bulama was the Gulak primary school headmaster during my primary school days, then he served as an executive officer to the missionary main hospital; and when Gongola State, he was created out of the defunct North Eastern State, he was elected the first representative of the State House of Assembly. M. Amtagu was the senior teacher of the primary school and later became the Inspector of schools. M. Dzugwahi became the first native pastor of the Gulak Church of the Brethren.<sup>17</sup> Gradually, the Gulak church under Pastor Dzugwahi became the mother church to the other Margi Udzirngu villages; the primary school under Mallam Bulama became the only senior primary school until the early 1960s.

In the other villages there were several junior primary schools, though children from the rest of the villages came to Gulak for senior primary school.<sup>18</sup> I recall children from the Villages of Midlu, Pallam, Maiva, Bitiku and Hyambula coming to Gulak in groups and staying in boarding homes or with relatives or the teachers for the weekdays, then returning home for weekends. The church started sending natives out to the various villages to preach in the mostly round hut churches or in temporary shelters to provide shade.

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<sup>17</sup> I will explore more of what became of these Margi Udzirngu men who were the first to receive western education in Chapter 4, “The Traditional Margi Udzirngu.”

<sup>18</sup> The term, “junior primary” signifies a school for the first four years of a child’s education, while “senior primary” signifies the last three years of primary education; classes five through seven, were available only at Gulak.

When I was attending school, the missionaries provided us with many things such as powdered dry milk and cod liver oil in the mornings and game equipment that attracted the youth of the village. When parents allowed school-aged children to attend school and occasional neighborhood gatherings organized by the missionaries, the children accepted Christianity. The parents at first resisted the new religion, but accepted it once the children were converted. The tribal youths, including myself, were taught to assume our “proper” roles in society. The message from our parents was that: “You can attend school, provided you take care of the animals after school and on weekends.” During my time in the junior and senior primary school at Gulak, there was a missionary secondary school and a teachers college already in operation at Waka Garkida. Many of the graduates of these schools went on to institutions of higher education in Nigeria and the United States.

### **Letters to the Home Church from the Field Harvesters**

In order to understand the missionaries’ frame of mind and expectations, before and during the mission venture, I tried to look for clues that might shed light on the main purpose for their coming to Bura and Margi land, and their activities among the Margi, specifically the Margi Udzirngu. To accomplish this, I examine the series of letters written by the missionaries to the Church of the Brethren in the United States. Such correspondence is of immense importance to my research as it gives me a window into the way the missionaries viewed the Margi Udzirngu.

One letter entitled “Impressions that Linger” was written to the home church by one Richard Burger, from Garkida, Nigeria, W. Africa, and was published in the

Gospel Messenger December 7, 1946. After nine months in the mission field in Nigeria, Mr. Burger wrote,

“I am further impressed by the material and professional progress that a primitive people have made in generation or two. Our own ancestors required centuries to make the changes these people have made in relatively short time[....] This material progress alone is not what I came to Africa to promote. That will only usher in an age of tariffs that starve, of nationalism that breeds wars, of greed that develops economic caste systems and of secularism that will allow men to use the creations and the fruits of their genius in all-out war. No, if I came for this I should return home at once, for I see the havoc and chaos that have been wrought in the earth and among nations by such progress”  
(p.12-13).

Mr. Burger wrote the preceding quote describing the progress made by the people of Garkida and Lassa, whom he referred to as “these Primitive People.” He was very surprised by the progress such people had achieved in the two decades after the arrival of the white missionaries. The progress mentioned included such skills as medical surgery, carpentry, and watch repairing and driving a motorcar, and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to resolve conflict among church members.

Let me assume for a moment that the progress Burger describes is an exaggeration. If it is, it came from a Christian white man whose pre-conceived notions of Africans as an inferior race had been proven wrong; furthermore, his

experience seems to cast serious doubt in his mind about the validity of some research conducted by others that attributed intellect to a particular race but not to others, particularly the black race. As Mr. Burger wrestles with the moral merit of the effect of civilization on his own culture, he wonders if he wants to be part of the team that will help in de-constructing the culture of “these primitive people,” as he referred to them, and then re-constructing it with the culture he himself deemed to be destructive.

Around the time Mr. James Bowman conducted his first baptism of the Bura people while he was still in training in Garkida, he wrote the following in a letter to the home church: January 10<sup>th</sup> 1948, titled “Go Ye...Baptizing...”

“[T]his is a primitive land and a primitive people, not greatly given to introspection. Their language has no word for family and no adequate term for love. Here even in the best of families, husband and wife go their separate ways, rarely if ever consulting together on matters of mutual interest. The care of children, money, education –in the past these have not been the mutual concern of husband and wife” (p.18).

This peek into the minds of the Margi Udzirngus’ so-called saviors from animism and Islam shows how the missionaries, at least in some partial way, viewed the people they claimed to care about and whom they came all the way from America to detribalize, and hopefully modernize. I can, for what it worth, humbly reject this characterization, and it is contrary to the characterization of the intellect of the natives by Mr. Burger. The family setup of the Bura and the Margi is very similar. In these

cultures, specifically in the Margi culture as I saw and felt it growing up, the issues that affect the family are of mutual concern for both the husband and wife. Women raise goats, chicken and sheep within their husbands' pens. When it is time to sell the sheep or goats, the husbands do the selling for the women and they talk about the money obtained and decide what to do with it for the benefit of the whole family. That was how my mission primary school fees and uniforms were paid for, with both my mother and father talking and cooperating with each other about the monetary issues. Men give their wives guinea corn to cook the local brew alcohol and sell it for their husbands when the need for money arises. The women report any disciplinary issue to do with the children, especially the teenage boys, to their husbands. But Bowman may have known these things too. He may have portrayed my culture as different or alien for reasons tied to strengthening his position with the home church. Or he may have indeed not known. It is hard to say without the chance to have interviewed him. But whatever the cause, he clearly misunderstood the nature of Margi families.

In his sixth year in the general mission area and the fifth in Gulak, Bowman wrote a letter describing the first junior primary pupil's graduation on December 27, 1953. There were only two students left of those who originally had been enrolled, as the rest of the pupils had either moved or dropped out. Still, Bowman felt that the mission was heading in the right direction. He hinted that the younger pupil would proceed to Garkida for further education and the older one would remain at home to farm.

From this letter, it becomes even clearer that the mission was bent on changing the Margi Udzirngu society for good. Bowman concluded that the community needed trained teachers and enlightened citizenry among the farmers. In addition to the school curriculum, the mission had added practical lessons in farming as crop rotation, soil improvement through composting, as well as better methods of cultivation with the plow and oxen. Mr. Bowman determined that a higher standard of living could be accomplished mainly by introducing better farming methods and more varied crops. He felt encouraged by the faithful attendance of the graduating pupils, and their work in witnessing to the community despite criticism at home. He solicited prayers from the home church so that the light of the pupils' witness would not fail in this "dark corner" (p.15).

Again, I disagree with Mr. Bowman on the notion of better methods of farming. These people had been farming and providing what was actually needed for generations. I hope that what he meant was that a more efficient method was clearly needed, and the mission did bring it to them in the form of plow and oxen. Neither did the words "variety of crops" mean anything new in this society, because in a season I could count seven or more crops on my father's farm. Soliciting prayers from the home church again sheds light on the preconceived notion that the missionaries believed their way was light and ours was dark. The missionaries' work could have been a lot easier if they had taken the time to find out exactly what the natives believed in.

This culture, for example, believed in polygamy and honoring of the elders, among other things; and there was no clear distinction between religion and the rest of the tribal lifestyle. The missionaries could not understand these things and condemned them outright along with the religion. Since all of this was foreign to them, the missionaries sought to bring changes to the society, which they judged to be "wrong." It was difficult for them to foresee how this culture could go hand in hand with the retailored eastern religion called Christianity that fits, and now belongs to, western civilization.

To understand why the Brethren missionaries felt this way about the Margi Udzirngu; one has to refer back to the *Remaking of Man in Africa* by J.H. Oldham and B.D. Gibson for some clue. They were of the opinion that the purpose for all branches of the Christian church was to believe in divine revelation and that if God has not made known his mind and purpose in Christ, then the ground of Christian mission disappeared (p. 17).

This was reinforced by the Belgian governor in Congo addressing a missionary conference in 1931 who said that: "The primary end pursued by missionaries is evangelization and nothing authorizes them to neglect it for other works or aims" (p.18). What seems to have been the conclusion, the creed of the missionaries was to remake Africans to be like them; the tool employed was to consider whatever the Africans were inferior and in need of remaking.

“[T]he aim of evangelization is not to win adherents to a particular set of beliefs, but to reveal to men the truth of their own existence in order that they may find and realize their true selves. If that truth is given in Christ, then the final purpose both of evangelism and of education can be achieved only through the answer of the whole man to the Christian revelation.” (Oldham & Gibson p. 21).

It is enough for the purpose of this thesis to state that the Margi religion was not paganism. The Margi I grew up with believed in the existence of God, Iju, that one cannot see with naked eyes. It was very courageous of Mr. Bowman to have left his comfortable home in California and to risk his life and those of his family members to come to sub-Saharan Africa to be with people he did not know. It takes dedication and a very good heart to be able to do that. It would, however, be disingenuous to categorically declare that all was perfect. As human beings, we can subconsciously carry unknown baggage with us. In other words, we can be sincerely misguided of our opinion of others, simply because we are not familiar with the way they do things. We would rather prefer them to see things in light of our own experience.

There is no question in my mind that the missionaries came with good intentions, and the foremost one was to preach the Gospel. Just like any other territorial conquests, there has to be a strategy. The strategy employed here was first to provide what they deemed at that point to be the immediate needs of the natives, a

dispensary to provide treatment for ulcers, colds and other minor ailments, schools for the young, and adult classes for the older people. These classes included summer classes for women to learn how to keep their homes clean and cook nutritious meals. Reading classes were taught mostly in the vernacular to prepare the adults for Bible reading. The strings that came with all these provisions were to win the natives over so that they would attend the covenant classes (*Alkawal*) as a first step toward the Christian baptism.

The strategy to provide what they deemed at that point to be the immediate needs of the Margi Udzirngu came right out of the colonialist's textbook. Just consider the following portion of a letter written to Oldham by East African colonial officer Eric Dutton, who was a friend and confidant of Lord Lugard:

“[I]f ever I am Governor ...I will devote all my energies to improving the lot of the natives in the small practical ways which go to make up life... to providing them with the means of improving themselves in mind and body and trying to make them believe, from what they see with their own eyes, that we are there to help....There are to my mind two outstanding factors in this problem. The first is Rule. Unless the natives are ruled firmly as well as wisely, we are bound straight for chaos. The second is Goodwill. Unless you do get the goodwill...you will never get the machinery to work properly.”(Cited in Myers 2003:p. ix)

During the time I took baptism classes, there was this burning desire in me and my neighborhood classmates, as I recall, to be constantly thumbing through the bible, to decide on which of the bible names we should take on, to replace our native names on the baptism day. In other words, the missionaries encouraged the Margi to rename themselves to begin a new way of living like the missionaries. This was the impression we all had. As a matter of fact, the church membership card given to an individual after baptism had the new baptism name on it. But as I later learned, about sixty to seventy percent of Margi Udzirngu traditional names have God's name, 'Iju,' in them. This appears either in the beginning, middle or at the end of the names. With this in mind, I decided to give my children Margi names, with the exception of one out of my four children.

In a letter entitled "The Singing Heart" published in the January 3, 1953 issue of the Gospel Messenger, Mildred Grimley, a missionary wife and a trained musician, correctly summarized the different African drum rhythms that were played by the Margi—for death, for hoeing, for breaking new ground, for weddings, for play, for old people, and for young people. She concluded that:

"The Margi has other instruments too, ingenious arrangements of stretched goats skins and gourds; horns of antelope and other bush animals; fifes made out of corn stalks, clay whistles, Scottish bag pipes, xylophones, zithers, flutes, kettle drums guitars—all can be found in a crude fashion tucked away in some African village" (p. 23).

One clue to the first purpose of the missionary venture to this distant land can be clearly seen as she further writes:

“The African in our area has a singing heart. We must teach him songs of Christ; we must take his tunes and put Christian words to them. Some may never have the opportunity to hear the words we say; many will not remember the message we speak, but the story of salvation will be sung. It will be remembered and preserved. It will be sung by their children and to their children’s children for they will be filled with the spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with all their hearts” (p. 23).

Africans in this missionary area may not have called their instruments by these names, but they definitely had instruments very similar to others around the world, even similar to the so-called developed world, as Mildred Grimley confesses. The only complaint she had in all of her letters was with what she called “the most chilling sound in the entire world”: the initial death wail of Margi women and the ensuing song of lament. The deceased was believed to be joining the ancestors that have already left the world, the mourner sings this song of lament recounting the life of the deceased, the causes of death, and how well he or she had done while still alive. Mrs. Grimley wondered if the Margi philosophy of crying and releasing emotions during such a painful time was not a wise one, rather than the Western approach of holding it in.

The reality is that in her letters, Grimley struggles with who the Margi are and the way she wishes they were. In other words, if she had her way, she would rather have the Margi see themselves through her culture. Even if it did not happen immediately, plans were being laid in place to alter the way in which the Margi would view themselves in the near future.

Grimley's discovery and suggestion that music could be a path to indoctrination helped the missionaries encourage the Margi men and women to see themselves through the eyes of the white missionaries. This plan seems to have succeeded; and, though it may have benefited the Margi, it benefited the missionaries first by allowing them to accomplish the mission of the church; to change the way of the Margi man to reject who he is in favor of the culture and the religion of his guest. That guest cared enough to come and settle among my people, but no matter how good intentioned a human being is history has shown that his or her plan cannot be perfect.

Like Joseph Oldham and countless British or Swiss or Swedish or Italian or American missionaries, the Church of the Brethren from America among the Margi Udzirngu intended to "uplift" the "primitive" people. One might see evidence that they did so -- as I will discuss in the next chapter--but only if one agrees to denigrate the "primitive" ways first.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Traditional Margi Udzirngu**

[B]etween the traditional and the new, or between order and adventure, there is no real opposition, and that what we call tradition today is a knit work of centuries of adventure.

Jorge Luis Borges

It is clear to me that the Margi Udzirngu traditional ways of living and the supposedly “modern” ways the missionaries imported into the Margi land are not contradictory or exclusive. They are merely two different ways of living, invented and perfected by two different peoples. It could have been more beneficial for both parties if each side had given in on some things and interacted with each other on a middle ground for the benefit of both groups. The Margi people did not have to be emptied of their culture completely for the culture of the missionaries to live with them, and vice versa. In theory the missionaries did not have to consider the Margi tradition a thing entirely of the past without any contemporary legitimacy, nor were the missionaries correct in assuming that modernity means modernism.

Accounts of modernity have commonly described the modern era, or modern people, as having a sense of historical time, based on new rational techniques for the ordering of time and space, and as drawing on a rationalist understanding of events to inform inventiveness and progress. This is contested strongly with previous eras (and other peoples), which are portrayed as having a mystical sense of time and a mystical and religious sense causality with dominant and static tradition unsuitable for informing social and technical progress (See Robinson, 2004).

Robinson argued that modernity is a problematic concept as it (Robinson, 2004) “allies the emergence of certain historically specific social formations with the ideas of progress; and it aligns this sense of progress with certain places only” Therefore, there is a need to figure out a new conceptualization of modernity beyond the historically specific process that supported the profoundly parochial identification of what it means to be modern that has emerged with the west.

With this in mind, I rely on the opinions of a selection of elders from this area, especially the Margi elders. Of those who were earlier graduates of the missionary schools themselves and, in collaboration with some of the missionaries, they wrote the book, Lardin Gabas: A Land, A People, and A Church in 1973. “Lardin Gabas” means “eastern district” in Hausa and is a name for the general area in which the Church of the Brethren planted mission stations. Each of the elders contributed a chapter, or co-authored one, on the culture of the various ethnic subgroups living alongside the Margi Udzirngu within the mission area. I supplement these opinions with what I saw, felt, and learned when growing up and also as an adult.

Kermon Thomason, a former Church of the Brethren Missionary to Nigeria, a former teacher and vice principal of the missionary teachers college, and also the compiler of the epilogue, quoted Albert Helser, one of the first missionaries, as saying (in 1923),

“One reached [Lardin Gabas] from the railhead in Jos in slow stages on horseback, rising before dawn to cover twelve to fifteen miles before the hottest time of the day. One will rest until the caravan of Nigerian carriers with sixty-pound head loads caught up. Then camp would be set up and after

noon and night spent in recuperation before repeating the performance the next day” (p. 7).

This narration is also true of the Margi Udzirngu area. In fact at that time, the Margi Udzirngu area was declared a closed territory by the British until 1959, when the first dirt road was constructed from Maiduguri to Mubi and lorries started passing through (Green, 1964).

When the former British Governor of Nigeria made what was then an acceptable statement in the minds of the colonialists that “for countless centuries, while all the pageant of history swept by, the African remained unmoved – in primitive savagery” (p.24), Mr. Gamace L. Madziga, the first native son to be the principal of the Waka Secondary School, declared the statement ‘absurd’ (p.24). Mr. Madziga then went further to give an example about the emir of Biu, who can trace his ancestry and enumerate his forefathers back to the middle sixteenth century (p. 25). Madziga argued that if one disregards the intervention of divine power, then the Bible was an oral story such as the oral history and stories of the Margi.

The point I am trying to make here is that the oral stories handed down by the Margi Udzirngu elders, those enacted at festivals, initiations, and on other occasions, are no different from the stories told by the Queen of England’s ancestors, which were passed down to her and which happened to have been written down later. The Margi believe our oral traditions to be the foundation of who the Margi Udzirngu are as a people. I think that the most polite part of mankind agrees in the value they have ever set upon the oral stories told of distant history.

History of our past may not be the same for all of us; for example, the past historical monument for the privileged may be the Tower of London or a Georgian building. For me, it is the simple remains of stone stacked round huts that once had a thatched roof on them in the enclaves and slopes of the Mandara Mountains in northeastern Nigeria. I associate this place with my childhood memories, just like others may do with world famous monuments, chatting with my grandma during my several visits to see her in the enclaves, envisioning the existence of something greater than myself by just merely looking at the clouds that settle on top of the mountain.

It is important to note here that, the Ptil system in Margi Udzirngu culture embodies partly the religious leadership. When Ptil Yarkur adopted the Islamic religion, his action brought an end to most of the festivals, including Yawal. The irony here is that it made it even easier for the missionaries to convert the rest of the Margi Udzirngu to Christianity as their Ptil no longer participated, or played the role of initiating and leading the traditional ways.

“Ptil Yarkur converted to Islam and he piously refused to engage in any of the traditional Margi public rituals. However, the symbolic position of the ptil in Margi culture was such that he was essential to those rituals; consequently, with that single conversion, public rituals ended. Traditional religion--the Margi world view--became moribund.” (Vaughn, 2006)



**This is a picture of Margi Women Climbing the Mandara Mountain on their way home in the mountainous enclave. The Village of Humbili where these women are going is still in existence. When I was young I climbed the mountain through this route countless times to visit my grandmother.**

Sources: *The Mandara Margi: A Society Living on the Verge*, by James H. Vaughan.  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~margi/>- same page as picture

### ***The Margi Udzirngu Prior to the Arrival of the Missionaries***

To understand the Margi Udzirngu, one must understand the subgroups that made up the larger ethnic group, their seasonal celebrations, marriages, and religious beliefs prior to the coming of the missionaries in 1948. As mentioned earlier, the Margi Udzirngu are the largest of the ethnic groups located within the enclaves and along the peripheries of the Mandara Mountains at the border between northeastern Nigeria and northwestern Cameroon.

## **The Subgroups**

Generally all of the subgroups seem to restrict themselves to particular areas called *giwa* (villages) around the slopes of the Mandara Mountains. Gulak is situated in the center of the other villages. Gulak is the village where the missionaries first settled in 1948, and for a few years it was the center of all activities before the missionaries spread to the nearby villages. The other village in the Margi Udzirngu area is Hyambula ,<sup>19</sup> which is about six miles north of Gulak. Hyambula is the new settlement for the Mashinyi subgroup. Madagali, which was formerly a Margi village until it was taken over by the Fulani people, is fifteen miles north of Gulak. Midlu village is about nine miles northeast of Gulak; Kaya is two miles west of Gulak. Shuwa village is five miles south of Gulak; Duhu village is three miles southeast of Gulak, and Pallam village is eight miles southeast of Gulak. There is also the village of Maiva not far from Pallam. The village of Kirngu is synonymous with the name Gulak, because the inhabitants came from the old village called Gulagu in the mountainous enclaves. Within these villages live the main Margi Udzirngu subgroups: Medugu, Uthali, Birdling, Gwaram, Chagwa, Mashinyi and others. Because these ethnic groups are all mixed up within the villages, loyalty is pledged first and foremost to the subgroup, then to the village and then to the Margi Udzirngu in its totality; lastly loyalty is pledged to the larger Margi ethnic group.

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<sup>19</sup> This is also spelled 'Chambal.'

## **Festivals**

### ***Yawal***

*Yawal* is a yearly religious festival. It takes place between mid June and early July during the rainy season when the guinea corn plants are about four to five feet high. It is celebrated by one village after the other. A cow is bought by an individual or a combination of two or more households and fattened for a year in an isolated room, *Thar thima*, and then slaughtered on a set date. Recently, the practice of cow fattening has been abandoned. The people are aware of the general time of the festival, but the specific date is set by the Margi king, *Ptil*, and his advisors. The celebration is observed for seven days. The blood of the cow is smeared on the front gate of Margi compounds to stop the evil spirits from entering the compound.<sup>20</sup> For the seven days in which the *Yawal* festival is observed, no farm work is allowed. If a person does work, and happens to be wounded by the farm implement, the Margi people believe that the wound may not heal. People from different villages come to the village celebrating *Yawal* to participate in eating food and drinking the local guinea corn brew. During the 1960s, *Yawal* lingered for while. I recall families celebrating *Yawal* and then also Christmas; finally Christmas took over the heart and the minds of the people.

### ***Angarawai***

This festival is more of a celebration of a successful harvest than anything else. The equivalent of Sukkoth, in Jewish tradition. It takes place during the dry season

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<sup>20</sup> In retrospect, this celebration has many elements of the Passover. When I read the book of Exodus in the Bible, I became convinced that *Yawal* is a watered-down Passover

immediately after the corn-thrashing season. The *Ptil* and his advisers set the date, and announce it about a month ahead of time to give the women enough time to prepare for the celebration. I recall the local women waiting in expectation for the *Ptil* and his advisors to announce the Angarawai date. The moment it is announced, Margi women begin the preparation of the decorative ornament they will be wearing on that date, so that they will look their best for the celebration. I recall my mother working on these ornaments for days.



**A picture showing the ornamental dress of women on the way to the yearly festival.**  
Sources : The Mandara Margi: A Society Living on the Verge, by James H. Vaughan.  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~margi/>



**A picture of how Margi girls dress for the Yearly Festivals.**

Sources : The Mandara Margi: A Society Living on the Verge, by James H. Vaughan.  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~margi/>

Angarawai usually falls on a Wednesday, the Gulak market day, and the celebrations begin in front of the *Ptil*'s palace, where all the subgroups will gather. The dance begins with the Angarawai song and the women walk in groups, dancing and singing for about two miles, ending at Duhu village. The younger people remain at Duhu to dance and play for few more hours before dispersing to their various villages. Part of the Angarawai tradition is that all the women dancers hold up a stick of sugar cane while they are singing the Angarawai songs, the drummers providing the beat to the song. During this festival, the fun thing for the young boys to do is to

snatch sugar cane from the girls and run away with it. None of these festivals are being practiced today.

### ***Marriage***

Margi Udzirngu parents customarily begin to entertain the idea of looking for a favorable wife for their male child when the child reaches the age of fourteen to fifteen. First, the father or the uncle will suggest a bride from the neighboring subgroup and seek the boy's opinion. If the boy agrees to it then the father or the mother will go to the parents of the girl early in the morning and ask for their daughter's hand in marriage to their son.

If the parents agree then they say "yes" to the inquiry, but ask for more time to consult with their daughter to ensure she will agree to marry the suggested groom. If she agrees to it, then her parents notify the parents of the boy and the process is set in motion. The process begins with what the Margi people call *Bill Shir'u*, which literally means "acquiring firewood for the mother of the girl to use for cooking or warming the hut." Normally the groom's parents send a plain piece of fire wood compound of the bride along with other gifts like solid salt, clothing, soaps, and so on.

Over the next one or two years, the marriage process includes the groom, his family, and friends doing farm work, building a mud hut for the bride's mother, and thrashing the guinea corn for the bride's family during the thrashing season. Also, *Dukwa* must be completed. *Dukwa* is an initiation processes that all the Margi boys have to go through on their way to manhood. It starts with the *Ptil* and the elders

setting a date, which usually comes after Yawal festival is completed. Each family with a male child who is old enough to go through the *Dukwa* process purchases a bull for the occasion.

The average age for a male child to go through the *Dukwa* initiation process is sixteen. His father and relatives slaughter the bull and share the meat between their family and the family of the bride. The close relatives on both sides are given small pieces of the meat. The bride is brought to the groom's parents' house that evening, and she stays with the groom for seven days, though with no sexual contact whatsoever.

All protocols have to be completed prior to the time the couple moves into a new compound built for them by their relatives, which is usually close, and to the west of, the groom's father's compound. The move is called *Fu-nkwa armbua*, which means "placing the bride in her room." At this time, a dowry is given to the bride's parents. This is the final step in the marriage process.

It is of the utmost importance for the bride to be a virgin at the time she is "placed in her room," as the Margi people call it. If the girl is not a virgin, she will be subject to taunting and unpleasant village songs about her and her family. The Margi Udzirngu men prefer to have many wives rather than extra-marital affairs; adultery is forbidden and the people believe that an adulterer cannot be a good leader (Lardin Gabas, 1973, p. 48).

## Religious Beliefs

The Margi believe in the existence of one God, called *Iju*. This “God that no one can see with naked eyes” could be referred to in songs as *Mala Iju*. *Mala* means “female” in the Margi language. This God is generally thought of as kind, but at the same time *Iju* can punish instantly.<sup>21</sup> A sacrifice is made to God by the *Ptil* on behalf of the whole Margi tribe at certain times: before planting, before harvesting, and at the times of disaster, such as when rain is needed for the crops and has not fallen and the farms are drying up. Each Margi man has his *Kaptu* in the household, placed at the back of the hut and occupied by the man of the house. To the best of my understanding, this *Kaptu* serves as a religious alter where a sacrifice is made to the God that cannot be seen. I recall discussing this with both my grandfather and my father. The *Kaptu* itself is not served as a god, contrary to what the missionaries believed.

This is how the Margi Udzirngu people were living prior to the arrival of the missionaries, or as best as we can understand it. When the missionaries arrived, some of these things started to evaporate into thin air. When the Margi Udzirngu were enthusiastically welcoming, and helping Mr. and Mrs. James Bowman settle down in their village, they might not have known they were saying yes to change. And yes, a cloud of change began settle on Gulak and the surrounding villages.

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<sup>21</sup> For example, a Margi Udzirngu person does not mourn anyone killed by lightning, as he or she is believed to have been killed by God (Lardin Gabas, 1973, 42).

## ***From Yawal to Christmas: the present day Margi Udzirngu emerges<sup>22</sup>***

In 1962, many neighborhood sons had gone through junior primary school and some of them had received training as grade three teachers. The village pastor, carpenter, gardener, and the dispenser were all from Gulak, they spoke Margi and were mostly related to all in the area. Their wives knew all the village women and they talked to each other about the new ways of the missionaries, the school, and the chapel. The majority of the village women were still wearing the traditional *Dzar*, a lamb or goat skin that has been finely sliced and woven at the top for the women to cover themselves from the front while *Gumbada* (a white and black piece of cloth similar to the one worn by Margi girls in the picture on page 64) covered them from the back.

For the men, especially those under forty, only few of them were still wearing the traditional *Pishi*, a whole lamb or goat skin smoothly worked and oiled and worn around the loins. As for my father, at that point I only remember seeing him wear it on certain occasions, during Yawal, corn threshing, and other festivals, but my

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<sup>22</sup> As I was about to write this next section I thought to myself, I will place one more phone call to my father. I called Kalbmu, my second-to-last brother, who then took the phone to my father. *Which part of the house are you in right now, father?* I asked. *I am sitting in front of the house*, he replied. In front of the house with the well: the last place my father moved the family in 1962. This is the first well that I ever saw and drank from. Ptil Yarkur had come to him very early one morning, my father had always said, and showed him the exact spot where he is living today, and asked that he move there, and he did.

During this conversation I confirmed some of the things I intend to record here that I think I remember from previous conversations with my mother, father, primary school teachers, relatives, and most of all, what I have witnessed when growing up among the Margi Udzirngu at Gulak. So in this section I intend to sketch out the approximate times these change occurred relating it to the time of the plebiscite, the missionaries' primary school seasons, and other important seasonal Margi Udzirngu festivals.

mother was still constantly wearing the *Dzar*.<sup>23</sup> In those days, men were reluctant to get involved with what the children and their mothers were doing. Most of them had to go to *Dandi*, distant places such as Maiduguri and Yola, to look for work between farming seasons. When they came back, they would bring with them clothing for their children, spices, hoes and other things that were not available around the general Margi area. The men started buying bicycles instead of horses and donkeys. Oxen and ploughs were first introduced by the missionaries and around this time the natives started buying them for themselves.

Margi women then changed from wearing the *Dzar* to the *Patali*, a strip of cloth with string on it to tie around their waists; then on to *Zhabi*, a cloth that they wrap around their waists. And, so it was that gradually the form of dress changed. Now most women wear a wrapper more, most of which are locally made. Most families then buy used clothing imported from France via Cameroon or from America or Britain for the children (at least my age group) with occasional new cloth sewn by local tailors.

At school, the children were encouraged to abstain from eating chicken or any meat that was sacrificed on *Kaptu* and from participating in any kind of traditional activities. The idea embedded in my mind that came with abstaining from eating such meat or participating in traditional activities was that since I had begun to read and

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<sup>23</sup> When I asked my father what was the turning point at which my mother stopped wearing the *Dzar*, he said it was when the women went to the church in late 1959 and early 1960. That was the time the women kept on saying *Zamman ashari*, which literally means, "Time has changed." At this time the issue of polygamy had discouraged most of the men from going to the church.

write, sooner or later I would be like the native teachers, with a teaching job, and all the villagers, my people, would call me *Mallam*, which means “a teacher” in Hausa. Teachers command respect among the people; they are the leaders and are consulted on almost all issues having to do with the outside world. The school children, therefore, should practice this anticipated standing in the community by abstaining from traditional activities and gaining an education.

Above all, abstaining from such activities was an action that came with the civilized behavior of a modern Margi young man. The school children were being looked upon with respect by all members of the Margi community; young girls’ preferred to befriend them more than the boys who were not attending school. To be a wife to a school teacher came with the title, *Madam*, to match the husband’s new title, *Mallam*. The rest of the community referred to the neighborhood of the missionaries, the teachers, the dispensers, and all the other workers as *Baraki*, a colloquial name for a place in a city, or for the city itself.

In general, association of any kind with the white missionaries placed a person in the realm of “being modern;” no one I knew did not want this. These ideas of being enlightened like the white missionaries started at a grassroots movement in Gulak, where the missionaries resided among the Margi Udzirngu. It found its way to the various villages and the new graduates of the Waka Teachers College, who were also posted there as teachers. Places like Midlu and Maiva had teachers from Gulak village who had finished the mission teacher’s training school. The teachers held positions as local preachers as well, in addition to teaching the Bible Knowledge class

in schools. Gulak remained the center for everything, where the pupil who had completed junior primary from the villages would come for the senior primary.

Earlier in the preceding section, I quoted Kermon Thomason, a former Church of the Brethren missionary to Nigeria, and a former teacher and vice principal of the missionary teachers college, who had quoted Albert Helser, one of the first missionaries to Nigeria, as saying how difficult it was in 1923 to reach the first mission station from the railway station in Jos in slow stages on horseback, rising before dawn to cover twelve to fifteen miles before the hottest time of the day. And I have earlier said that this was also true of the Margi Udzirngu area. Fifty years later in 1973, Mr. Bitrus P. Sawa, the first Bura native son to be the principal of the missionary secondary school at Waka, wrote that one could fly from Jos to Biu in a little over an hour. He then wondered at that change, a remarkable development had taken place over the course of fifty years (p. 75).

In 1973, I was in the ninth grade, "Form Three". Thirty-six years later, I am reporting that the agents of change that came with the American missionaries, through the church, and the school have taken the Margi Udzirngu, just like everyone else, into the twenty-first century. The Margi Udzirngu descendents, the product of the missionary schools, are right in the middle of it. I know those who have gone on to become doctors, lawyers, army generals, senators, members of the House of Assembly, state commissioners, and recently, the Adamawa State Deputy Governor, just to mention a few.

Mr. Sawa summed up the work of the missionaries as follows:

“One of the great results was the fact that the new faith brought together people from all walks of life and from diverse tribal and clan backgrounds into new brotherhood. Reconciliations began to take place across all lines of hostility, a new equality of all men before God wrought its transformation in individual and communal life” (p. 84).

While this is true on all level of activities within the Margi Udzirngu villages, it also had the negative effect of eradicating the original culture of the people. The schoolboys went home every day slightly changed by the teachers who were trained and paid by the missionaries. Just as the British Government gradually changed the northern Nigeria citizens through the emirs and indirect rule, the missionaries changed the society through the native teachers and the pastors. The Margi Udzirngu society will never be the same.

## ***From Family Patriarchal Culture to Western Democratic Culture***

### ***Patriarchy and the Ptil System***

Prior to the coming of the missionaries, the living space of the Margi Udzirngu ethnic group—especially those residing in the mountainous enclaves and its peripheries—provided the people with a natural barrier to most of the forces of change and to intertribal communication with their neighbors. As such, patriarchal/indigenous systems of administration thrived without interference from external forces. In a nutshell, the oldest of the family served as the judge, the advisor,

and the custodian of the family oral history. He was looked upon to settle disputes among family members, or marital problems, and most of the time; he would consult and look for advice from those in the family who were close to him in age.

As most of the family groups came out of the enclaves, the British, headed by the Fulani conquerors, set up a system for administrative convenience in which the Margi Udzirngu were placed under one *Ptil*. The family (clan) patriarch assumed the role of *Bulama*, who had to be officially confirmed by the *Ptil*, after which the *Bulama* became a member of the *Ptil*'s council of advisers. The reality is that, with colonialism the position of the *Bulama* had more to do with the convenience of collecting tax more than any other administrative duty. He still settled minor disputes within his domain (*giwa*) before they reached the *Ptil*, but the *Ptil*, under the new native authority system, had administrative and judicial powers.

### **Western Democratic Culture**

The development of Western political culture engulfed the Margi Udzirngu like nothing else before. In November 1959, the United Nation Trustee Council held a plebiscite in the two parts of Nigeria and Cameroon that had been German Kameroun territory, to determine if the territory would become part of Nigeria or Cameroon. The Federal Election for the Federation of Nigeria was scheduled for December 12, 1959, although the United Nations Trustee Council intended to use the previous plebiscites election results from the preceding month. The intent of the plebiscites' was to give

the Margi Udzirngu and the surrounding tribes the choice to either join Nigeria or remain under the U.N Protectorate.<sup>24</sup>

Political parties were new to the northern Nigerian populace. Although there were many parties formed to compete for the loyalty of the people, not all of them competed with equal tenacity among the Margi Udzirngu people. The dominant party, the Northern Nigerian People's Congress (NPC), despite its association with the dominant Fulani ethnic group, solicited for and gained the support of the local "pagan" chiefs, the Margi Udzirngu Ptil included. Another party, Action Group (AG), was the second one to campaign in the area. With the support of the pagan chiefs, the NPC elites, who were mostly Muslims and Native Authority employees, viciously accused AG of being a western Nigerian, traditionally Christian Yoruba ethnic party, and in opposition both to the Fulani ethnic group and to Islam as a religion. But the opposition party, AG, with its mostly Christian followers, appealed to the Mandara Mountains ethnic subgroups despite the fact that their chiefs supported NPC. This is in part because the Margi had always associated the Fulani's with slavery, and societal domination in general.

What is interesting about the followers of AG in this area is that the area was comprised of the Christian educated elite, but the leadership went to the nephew of the *Ptil*, who was the eldest son of the last *Ptil* of Gulak, and as such he was believed to be the appropriate heir to the kingship in Gulak. He felt that it was the right time to challenge the authority of his uncle, since his previous complaint to the government

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<sup>24</sup> See Vaughan (1964, p. 66).

about his right to the kingship had been ignored. The plebiscite vote showed firsthand how independent the Margi Udzirngu are, and their ability to recognize their interests by rejecting the NPC's pitch to join Nigeria. Instead they went against the anticipations of the NPC political leaders by voting to remain under the UN trusteeship.

In view of the reasoning why the union with Nigeria was rejected, a second plebiscite was arranged. The choices were a union with Nigeria or with the Republic of Cameroon. Under this proposal, Gulak and its surrounding area would be administered from Mokolo, Cameroon. The Margi Udzirngu were aware that the Mokolo district was headed by the brother of their former enemy and slave raider, Hamman Yaji, the former district head of Madagali who was earlier desposed by the British and sent to Sokoto in exile. With this new development, the Margi Udzirngu immediately shifted their loyalty to the NPC. After a series of hearings, the Northern Region Government came up with the following:

“1. The Northern Region Government declares that with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> of July, 1960, the area of the Northern Trust Territory shall be constituted as a separate Province which will be known as the Trusteeship Province and which will be of equal status with the other 12 Provinces of the Northern Region until 1st October after which date the area will be temporarily administered directly by the United Kingdom.

“2. The Regional Government also declares that if in the forthcoming plebiscite the people of the Trusteeship Territory decide to join the Federation of Nigeria, that they will do so on the terms accepted by all political parties at the recent London Conference and the area will be administered as a separate Province of the Northern Region.

“3. This will guarantee the newly established Native Authorities of Gwoza, Mubi, Chamba and Gasshaka/Mambilla their proper status within the framework of the Native Authority Law and guarantee that there will be in the future no question of any of these Native Authorities being subordinate to any existing Native Authorities outside the Boundaries of the new Province” (Vaughn, 1964, p. 66).

What made this more acceptable to the various ethnic groups, especially the majority Margi Udzirngu ethnic group, was the fact that each local district council would have an equal number of elected representatives. When such an election was conducted in Madagali District, where Margi Udzirngus were living, none of the elected representatives were Fulani. Those representatives in turn chose a Christian as their district head. This gave the Margi Udzirngu their freedom from the Fulani. In addition, the issue of voting rights for women came up in the hearings, and women successfully voted in the second plebiscite, in which union with Nigeria was approved.

The second plebescite is, in a way, symbolic of the beginning of the end of the old Margi identity, since by joining Nigeria, the Margi Udzirngu acknowledged the western concept of a “Nation-State” and subsumed themselves within it. As with Christianity and mission schooling, participation in a modern nation has its benefits for the Margi, but at a cost –the loss of more fluid concepts of family patriarchy and other “traditional” political concepts.

## Conclusion

“The beginning of love is to let those we love be perfectly themselves, and not to twist them to fit our own image. Otherwise we love only the reflection of ourselves we find in them...”

Thomas Merton, catholic mystic and contemporary critic

There has always been resistance and controversy over the planting and practice of the Christian religion since it entered Africa through Egypt and Ethiopia shortly after it originated in Palestine. In most cases, the difficulties arise because of the tendency of Christianity to overshadow the existing religious practices. In addition, the introduction of Christianity also introduces a new culture that is foreign to the people who are being converted. Despite efforts by the practitioners of Islam to eradicate Christianity in North Africa and eastern Sudan, Christianity nevertheless persisted, and subsequently produced the well known African theologians in the persons of Cyprian, the Bishop of Carthage, and St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo (Mazrui & Levine p.69). These believers were responsible for spreading Christianity among the Berbers and the Nubians. Gradually the Islamic religion succeeded in phasing out these first Christians, with the exception of Ethiopia.

The new phase of Christianity that came with the western Europeans beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, later followed by the Americans, had even more dense cultural ornaments; though their main objective was to challenge and block the

influence of Islam. Christianity continued to dismantle various cultures that stood in its way.<sup>25</sup>

One example of the intolerance of western religions to African indigenous religions and cultures is illustrated by the fact that in 1958, two years before Nigerian Independence, a young Ibo man named Albert Chinualumogu Achebe from Southern Nigeria wrote a satirical literary novel, Things Fall Apart. In this novel, Achebe explores a very similar theme to my own: the struggle between change and tradition in Ibo society brought by the coming of the white man with a new religion that set in motion the disintegration of traditional society and religious practices in nine Ibo related villages—an area that is similar to the Margi Udzirngu Villages. In the Margi Udzirngu area, elderly men left church attendance to their women and children. In Things Fall Apart, the character Okonkwo feels the same way. He resists the new religious order because he feels that the missionaries are not manly and that he will compromise his manhood if he joins the church or even tolerates its presence for that matter.

Just like the Margi Udzirngu men, Okonkwo's resistance to cultural change can be attributed to some extent to his fear of losing social status. Men in African culture, or at least the Margi Udzirngu men, base their self-worth upon the traditional standards by which society judges them as the heads of their individual households,

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<sup>25</sup> See Mazrui & Levine, *The Africans: A Reader*, “The Triple Heritage of Lifestyles,” p.69.

then as a group. The men are responsible for guiding their community in all affairs and have the final say in social and political matters.

The colonial conquest placed a tax burden upon the men of the Margi Udzirngu. The missionaries' activities accelerated the de-culturalization process as the children and their mothers spent more and more time with the church members as a group than they did with their husbands as family units. All the villages in general were caught between resisting and embracing change and were faced with the dilemma of trying to determine how best to adapt to the reality of change. Some scholars have argued that these are the fundamental methods used across Africa by Western nations to eradicate primordial cultures in Africa under the pretense of civilizing them. Cheikh Hamidou Kane, in 1972, wrote that:

“...[W]e reject the foreign school in order to remain ourselves, and to preserve for God the place he holds in our heart. But have we still enough force to resist the school, and enough substance to remain our self?” (p.12)

I have indicated in the preceding pages that when I asked my father when my mother and the other women last use the *Dzar*, he said that they abandoned traditional dress when they went to the church. The next thing the men knew is that the women threw their *Dzar* away and said *Zaman ashari dam*, which in the Margi language means that times have changed. In many ways, they were also referring to what Cheik Hamidou Kane is saying. They did not have enough substance left in them to remain

themselves. In other words, they were powerless to resist the influence of the church and the school.

In this thesis, I have been rethinking the effects of the foreign missionaries' mission to Africa, focusing on the Church of the Brethren Missionaries' activities among the Margi Udzirngu in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The conclusion I will stand by is that tremendous social, political, and religious change has occurred since Bowman set foot on Margi Udzirngu land in 1948. Even though it is not as good as it should be—considering the wealth that comes to Nigeria through oil production—one could conclude that the living conditions of the Margi Udzirngu has changed for the better.

The primary objective of my research was to understand how the Margi Udzirngu have been transformed as a result of their contact with the missionaries, and to see if the trickle-down of this cultural marriage helped to change the life of the present day Margi Udzirngu.

Since the Church of the Brethren has now become an American Church after leaving Germany, I have always wondered, what is the difference between the ideas of the missionaries that came to my home, and those of the first white Americans regarding territorial formation in the new world? Who decided to come to America, set up shops, make guns and badges, and decide to tax whoever was living in the territory? When the American Indians resisted, they were rounded up and fenced in, then sedated with alcohol so that they no longer bothered the newcomers.

On the other hand, when the missionary came to Nigeria, they sedated the Margi Udzirngu with the religion they called Christianity. Although the Margi Udzirngu woke up without a hangover, they forgot the way they worshipped the one God they had always known. I have indicated that the other agent of change was the Euro-American culture implicit in the religion the missionaries brought with them, especially via the schools, the dispensary, and the efficient farming methods they planted. In other words, the Margi Udzirngu were politely, culturally conquered by the missionaries.

To comprehend how these changes happened in the general areas of the Lardin Gabas, with an emphasis on Gulak and the various Margi Udzirngu villages, I want to conclude by employing the concept of “double-consciousness” coined by W.E.B. DuBois, an American scholar who was familiar with how the dominant American culture and religion phased out the culture and religion of new immigrants. “Double-consciousness” indicates the degree to which he viewed the relationships between the culture and religion of the black American slave as constantly at odds with the dominant white American culture and religion.

DuBois argued that the formerly enslaved Africans in the Americas are at the bottom of the social spectrum. They are either hindered from or have not obtained the necessary abilities to succeed in American culture. They lost their African culture and filled the void with the new culture of the Americas.

The Margi Udzirngu ethnic group, on the other hand, found themselves to have lost much of their Africanness, though without having been forced. This started

to happen when they first stepped into the Church of the Brethren, sang the Church of the Brethren songs, swallowed the dispensary medicine, and learned the school alphabet. De-culturalization took off like wild fire with the Margi Udzirngu schoolboys carrying the lighted torch and burning every Margi cultural artifact the missionaries were not familiar with. Needless to say, the encouragement to do so came from their native school teachers and elders, who were themselves the product of the mission schools and were paid by the missionary school authorities. This cultural phase-out, the missionaries claimed, was done in the name of God, for whom they wanted to bring a cleaner way of living to the Margi Udzirngu ethnic group. The Margi Udzirngu have a form of double consciousness now, as westernized Christians that nonetheless seem to lack some of the tools to succeed in the western world.

I also conclude by borrowing the notion of the “Imagined Community” from Benedict Anderson to explain how previously primordial ideas from groups like the Margi ethnic community went around the globe, got refined, then came back under different names and were used to frame the Margi Udzirngu. I have also taken from Anderson his ideas about how print capitalism combined with the local vernacular to encourage religious discourse among similar groups that would subsequently become an imagined community.

In Chapter 2, I outlined the first contact the Margi Udzirngu ever had with the outside world, and identified the persons of Idris Alauma, Heinrich Barth, and C.K. Meeks for the purpose of historical significance and for understanding how the guest and the host traditionally viewed each other in Margi culture. More importantly, I

discussed how the Margi ethnic groups viewed themselves historically through the eyes of their Arab, German, and English guests. I tried to identify the common theme between these relationships.

In Chapter 3, I traced the historical background of the Church of the Brethren Mission back to Germany, though it is now considered an American Church. I identified the first pioneers from the church to Africa and the purpose of the church's mission. I charted the obstacles the pioneers faced, their activities among the Margi Udzirngu, as well as how the Margi Udzirngu responded to those missionaries. I questioned if the new religion (as a vehicle of American culture) has benefited or improved the living condition of the Margi Udzirngu in any meaningful way, and finally I question whether it contributed to the de-Margi-nization of my people.

In chapter 4, I argued that the traditional Margi Udzirngu ways of living and those of the missionaries were neither contradictory nor exclusive. Neither group had to be emptied completely for the other to fill the gap. I relied tremendously on the opinions of various elders of the Lardin Gabas ethnic groups to infer that the history of the Margi Udzirngu is not too different from the history of other ethnic groups in other parts of the world.

I have presented and analyzed who the Margi Udzirngu were generally, prior to the arrival of the missionaries in terms of the subgroups, the various yearly festivals, the marriage customs, and the ways they worshiped the monolithic God in whom the Margi had always believed. I discussed the transition from Yawal to Christmas celebrations and from family patriarchal culture to western democratic

culture, which also included patriarchy as well as the Ptil system. I analyzed how the present day Margi emerged within a western democratic culture. As such, I believe this research has presented to the outside world what it means to be Margi.

One may ask why this story matters. The answer is: it is one story shared by many African groups of how they underwent cultural change, how the western world viewed them, and the implications of these cultural changes in terms of the alteration of national and cultural identity of the African people. Many similar cultures in Africa struggle with their sense of belonging. This story matters because the outside world must face challenges to their preconceived notions that every Margi, Kenyan, South African, or members of any African country for that matter are the same and has no history. If we do, indeed, have a history, how much of it will the western world ignore by simply doing whatever is in their power to eradicate and replace it with their own history?

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